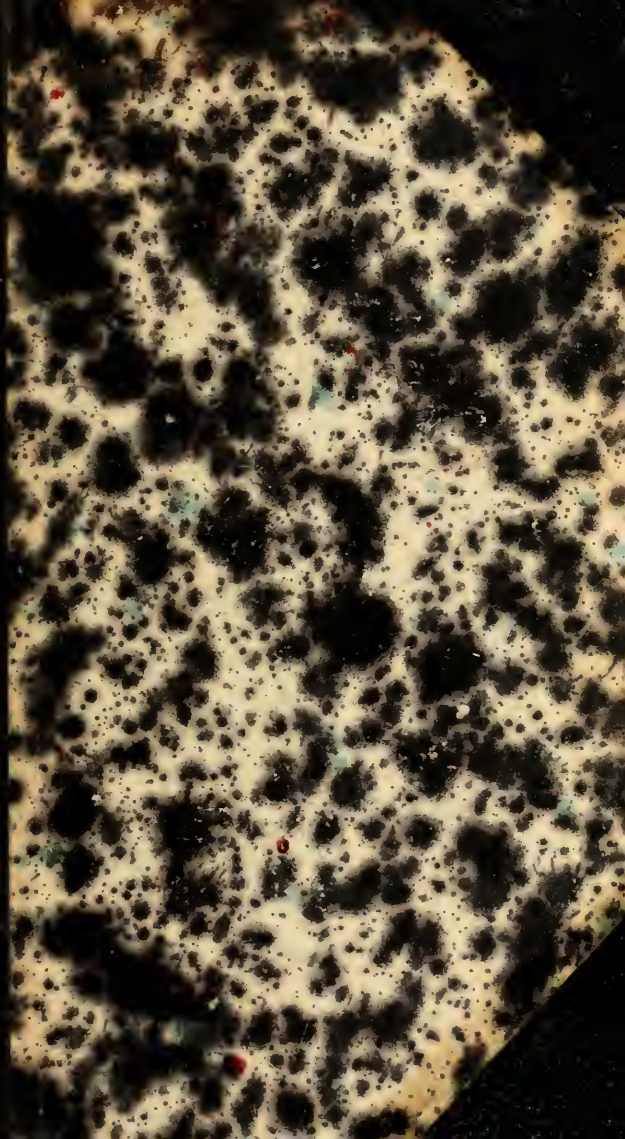






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TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 2359.

COLONEL ENDERBY'S WIFE BY LUCAS MALET.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

“Lequel de nous n’a sa terre promise, son jour d’extase, et sa fin dans l’exil?”—AMIEL.

COLONEL
ENDERBY'S WIFE.

A NOVEL.

BY

LUCAS MALET.

Library of the University of Michigan

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1885.

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COLONEL ENDERBY'S WIFE.

BOOK FIRST. FATHER AND SON.

CHAPTER I. "LE ROI EST MORT."

THE house at Bassett Darcy lies low. From around it the well-timbered park rises on three sides, in gentle undulations, towards the stretch of high table-land forming the south-eastern corner of the county. On the fourth side, broad lawns slope down to the banks of the Tull—a quiet, uneventful stream, that wanders indolently through mile after mile of rich meadow land, past osier beds and alders, and long lines of pollarded willows; under the wide arches of old brown sandstone bridges; by villages of quaint half-timbered houses, and spinneys, where the rooks congregate and nightingales sing in the early summer; and by waste places—pleasant spots in which Nature has her own way still, and refuses to be put in harness and to labour for the general good of mankind in any more direct manner than by an offering of sweet scents and

colours—places overgrown with meadow-sweet, and yellow flags, and pink willow-herb, and tall spikes of purple loosestrife, and docks, and nodding grasses—by these the river wanders to mingle its current at last—some few miles west of the bright little modern watering-place of Tullingworth—with that of the historic Avon, and so find its way to the Severn, and the far distant unknown sea.

The Tull is anything but dramatic. It indulges in no sparkling races over rounded boulders, no splashings into deep pools, no roar and rush, no petulance or bubbling laughter. The steady monotonous repose of the Midlands lies upon it. Like the men and women who live in the green pastoral country beside its banks, it is moderate, neutral-tinted, slow, self-absorbed, and silent. At first sight it appears to be somewhat wanting in individual character. Yet this quiet midland stream is capable of yielding very pretty effects of light and shade, of form and colour to those who will take the trouble to look for them. And undoubtedly its neighbourhood lends a singular charm to the grounds at Bassett Darcy.

Just below the garden front of the stately Jacobean mansion it makes a sharp curve away to the right, round a thickly wooded spit of land; and, thanks to an artificial widening of the river bed, presents to the eye quite an imposing expanse of smooth shimmering water.

The house itself shares in great measure the restrained and unemotional aspect of the river. It is a large square building of the yellow-brown sandstone of the country; with rectangular windows and doorways, and a low-pitched slated roof, but just visible over the

line of the parapet. This style of architecture is singularly innocent of surprises; it is full of solidity and sobriety, and is altogether too dignified to pander to a frivolous taste for the superficially picturesque. The only incident in the serious *façade* at all claiming attention is the great double flight of stone steps leading up to the hall door. These steps are pleasant to contemplate. There is a generousness about the descending curve of the massive balustrade, and an air of easy hospitality about the broad stairway that proves decidedly encouraging to the guest arriving at Bassett Darcy.

Here the Enderbys have lived for many generations—a strong vigorous race, with but little tendency to dwindle down to an unsatisfactory point in the person of one female representative. There is a certain virility, a healthy coarseness of fibre about most of them, which promises to the fat family acres—even in these thin, eager, somewhat over-civilized times—a long continuance in the possession of heirs male. A mellow canvas in a carved and gilded frame, hanging in the dining-room at Bassett, sets forth in its most agreeable and impressive aspect the true Enderby type. It represents a large fresh-complexioned gentleman in a curled wig, with a round solid head, short nose—wide across the nostrils and slightly inclining to aquiline—a long, full upper lip, pouting mouth, large lower jaw, with plenty of what—for the want of a better word—one must needs call jowl, and prominent light-brown eyes under slightly arched eyebrows. His neck is thick, and is encircled by a voluminous neckcloth of the finest India muslin. The glint of a steel cuirass shows under his scarlet coat

bountifully adorned with gold lace. The picture is by Sir Joshua Reynolds; and, doubtless, "Philip Enderby, Esq., Major-General of His Majesty's Forces, Colonel of the 204th Regiment of Foot, and Governor of Fort George, in North Britain"—as an inscription runs under a print from the original picture—fared very well at the hands of that most courteous and genial of portrait-painters. You cannot avoid a suspicion that a few too powerful lines have been gently obliterated; that the gallant general's eyes were not quite so clear, and that his complexion was a few shades deeper in tone. You feel pretty sure that he must have been a man of strong animal passions; straightforward and honest in character, but also not a little obstinate, arrogant, and tyrannical. A person rather inordinately sensible of his own importance in the universal order of things; kind-hearted, yet disposed to bully and bluster, and eminently unfitted to appreciate the best of jokes, if made at his own expense.

Most of the Enderby men have adhered pretty closely to the above type; and, perhaps consequently, have not created for themselves a very definite place in history. The eldest son of the house has usually gone into the army; but with the exception of General Philip, whose portrait hangs in the dining-room, the Enderbys, until the present generation, have not contributed any conspicuously distinguished soldiers to the service of their country. Perhaps Bassett Darcy is somewhat to blame in this matter, and has helped to check the full development of the family genius. Advanced thinkers tell us that the possession of a perfectly secure social position and the prospect of a comfortable inheritance are apt to paralyze ambition,

and strangle those finer emotions which inspire a man to forge his way upward in the world. No doubt it is "no mean happiness to be seated in the mean;" but it is a species of happiness liable, they say, to be cherished somewhat to the exclusion of distinct progress and high endeavour.

It may be broadly stated, then, that most of the Enderbys have lived uneventful lives enough; have mixed freely in the best local society, have married young, ridden hard to hounds, quarrelled hotly over county politics, consumed a very fair portion of first-rate wine; have been reckoned considerably important—an opinion they were disposed to share in sincerely themselves—within a radius of some twenty or thirty miles; and when, after a long and usually respectable, if not brilliant, career, Death has called for them, they have prepared—perhaps a trifle unwillingly—to obey his summons, and ascend to some not too spiritually minded or ecstatic quarter of the New Jerusalem.

Occasionally, however, even in the most physically and mentally conservative of races there occurs a sudden deflection from the accustomed type. It is probably only a case of reversion, of a return to an older strain of blood. Be that as it may, the individual exhibiting these unusual qualities and tendencies appears to have a dash of original genius. He is tempted to emerge, to take a new departure, and, consequently, runs the risk of becoming confusing, if not downright objectionable, in the eyes of his near relations.

It is a case of the kind which forms the basis of this unpretentious chronicle. Scientifically considered, this is the history of a deviation—of a doubtfully suc-

cessful exception to a safe, though unexciting, general rule.

One evening, towards the close of October, 1876, a peculiar stillness seemed to reign at Bassett Darcy. It was a stillness of expectation rather than of repose; and Dr. Mortimer Symes, sitting in the wide window-seat of the big blue bedroom over the hall, was curiously sensible of the silent pause which penetrated the atmosphere of the large house, and appeared even to spread itself over the face of the serious landscape outside. The rolling pasture land of the park showed a dull green, with a sandy bloom upon it here and there from the stalks of the withered spare-grass. In the distance long beds of pale mist lay across it, out of which rose the trees and scattered clumps of hawthorn bushes. It was too dark clearly to see the colour of these latter; but you might perceive a warm russet tinge over their dark foliage. Along the top of the hill, just outside the park wall and about half a mile distant, the trees and cottages in Priors Bassett village rose in a dense mass against the sky, the twisted chimneys and gable-ends showing sharp and black against the light behind them. The sky itself, a pale opaque blue, shading into a bank of dove-coloured earth-mist below, was covered to the westward beyond the village, where the bare upland met the sky-line, with a fine network of delicate crimson and flame-coloured cloud.

Dr. Symes was given to observation in many departments besides the strictly professional one. He was fond of perceiving analogies and correspondences between natural and spiritual phenomena. He had also cultivated a power of double consciousness; and

though acutely aware of every sound that came from the great blue-curtained bedstead, where lay old Mr. Matthew Enderby—his strong vigorous life slowly ebbing, sinking, failing, like the failing day—the doctor was also quite sufficiently unabsorbed to note both the quiet of the house and effects of the waning sunset outside. He wished, if possible, to drive back to Tullingworth that night; but he had half-promised Mr. Jack Enderby to stay to the end. He did not think the end was very far off now; and, meanwhile, he felt quite at liberty to entertain himself with a calm, if sympathetic, observation of his surroundings.

Poor Jack Enderby, on the other hand, sitting at the farther side of the bed, and watching in the growing dimness, was anything but calm. He found himself in the unfortunate position of a man who has a disagreeable message to deliver, and who dreads almost equally the opportunity and the absence of an opportunity for delivering it.

Jack was really an excellent fellow, and, notwithstanding a short, reddish-yellow beard and a white tie, realized very completely the true Enderby type. He had plenty of pluck—of nothing tangible or material was he for an instant afraid; but not even the influences of his sacred profession had supplied his original lack of moral courage. He went in mortal fear of what is best described as a scene or a situation. There was nothing gloomy, sacerdotal, prophetic, or denunciatory about him; and, unless he happened to be personally offended—like most persons of his complexion, he was a trifle hot-tempered—few things were less congenial to him than admonishing backsliders, pointing sternly to the path of duty, and

foretelling the plagues justly following on all wilful hardening of the heart. I am afraid it must be admitted that Mr. Jack Enderby had not any special vocation for the priesthood, and that the exercise, during a period of some twenty years, of his spiritual calling had not made him different, in any sensible degree, to the ordinary run of English provincial gentlemen.

At last there was a movement on the part of old Matthew Enderby. He shifted his position slightly, and began speaking in a thick unmodulated voice. There was an evident struggle and difficulty about his articulation, and at first the words spoken were barely intelligible.

Jack moved uneasily in his chair, and cleared his throat with a touch of nervousness. He glanced inquiringly up at Mortimer Symes as he did so; but the doctor sat quite still, his high conical head, hooked nose, long shaven upper lip and straight chin, with its straggling and grizzled imperial, silhouetted against the light background of the window. Jack, looking up at him suddenly, was forcibly struck by the eminent medical man's resemblance to a goat; and then felt a little ashamed of himself for having ventured to think of anything at all amusing under existing circumstances.

"The scent's cold," murmured old Matthew Enderby, huskily, "cold—cold. It's no use trying any more. Better give up and get away home. Don't you see, it's getting dark?"

Jack held aside the blue stuff curtain of the great old-fashioned four-post bed, and leant forward.

"Can you hear me, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, I can hear you well enough, Jack," answered

the old man, in the same thick, monotonous voice. "Pity they made a parson of you, Jack; but you'll have it all your own way soon, parson or not. None of 'em can prevent that. You're a regular Enderby, Jack—eyes and jaw and all. But the scent's cold," he went on, "and it's getting dark and late."

Mr. Jack Enderby was one of those easy-going, kindly natured, unimaginative men who are never quite prepared for the deeper and sadder experiences of life. They never get over a sensation of surprise at the neighbourhood of sickness and death. Their own superabundant vitality makes these two things appear so extremely improbable to them. Jack did not certainly love his father with any very exuberant affection; but, as he put it himself, he "felt awfully cut up at seeing the old gentleman lying there," and this state of feeling made it all the more difficult to deliver messages which he was pretty well convinced would prove highly unacceptable.

"Never mind about me, sir," he said, with a certain effort, and speaking as distinctly as he could. "I don't want you to think about me just now, but about my brother."

He paused, hoping that the words might awaken a train of sleeping memories, and thereby make what had still to be said easier in the saying of it. But Matthew Enderby's intelligence—never a very active one—was clouded with the mists of weakness and approaching death. His thoughts, as so often happens just at the close, wandered back to the days of youth and early manhood.

"Brother," he asked slowly, "which brother? There was poor Darcy, he was drowned at sea; and there

was Godfrey—fighting Enderby, they used to call him—never saw a better man with the gloves in my life. He fought a bargee down in Barnwell one Saturday night, and sewed him up so that he couldn't move for a month. Bless me! he was a fine fellow; but your mother never liked him, somehow. He hasn't been here this long while. Is he dead too, Jack?" he added suddenly in a sharper tone.

"I didn't want to speak to you about poor Uncle Godfrey, sir," Jack Enderby answered—"not about your brother, but——"

"Ah! he's gone, I remember," interrupted the old man, speaking faster and more clearly. "They're all gone—my brothers and my old friends. God help 'em! you don't see such men nowadays. And Matt's gone. And your mother's gone too, Jack. Ah, dear me!"

The tears came in Jack's eyes, and ran down over his fresh-coloured cheeks. All this was horribly painful to him. He would have liked to say something gentle and comforting to Mr. Enderby at that moment; but a feeling of diffidence, perhaps of false shame, held him back. His relations with his father had always been of a rather rough-and-ready sort. "I wish to goodness Augusta was here," he thought. "Women are so much better at saying appropriate things than we are."

Matthew Enderby stretched his right arm out stiffly, and felt down over the bed-clothes for the head of an old wire-haired terrier, that lay sleeping, rather uneasily, on the bed beside him.

"They're all gone," he repeated, slowly and sadly. Then he fondled the old dog's head with feeble, uncertain fingers.

Dr. Symes got up from his place in the window. He was a short thick-made man, and limped a good deal in walking. He came across to the bedside, and stood there for a moment, looking narrowly at Matthew Enderby, who lay with his eyes half shut.

"I do not wish to distress you unnecessarily, my dear Mr. Enderby," he said in a low voice, glancing across at Jack, "but I fear the time granted you for speaking—pardon my alluding to private matters—is likely to be limited. I cannot counsel delay." And with that he retired to his seat in the window again.

Jack bent over the bed. As the saying is, he took his courage in both hands.

"Father," he said, "you remember my brother?—you remember Philip?"

Matthew Enderby opened his eyes, and turned his head sharply on the pillows.

"And what about Philip?" he asked curtly, almost angrily.

"He's here, sir. He's downstairs. He came early this morning; but you've been sleeping a good deal, and we couldn't tell you sooner. He wants to see you. Won't you see him, sir, just for five minutes—just once before——"

Jack stopped abruptly. His words had produced an effect he had not looked for.

Old Matthew Enderby, filled with sudden strength, sat bolt upright in bed, his face firm, high-coloured, passionate as it had ever been in the fulness of his manly vigour.

"I sent your brother Philip out of this house three-and-twenty years ago, and dared him ever to come back to it!" he cried in a loud, vibrating voice. "He

broke your mother's heart. By her deathbed I swore I would never forgive him; and I will never forgive him, never!"

Jack was shocked, pained, altogether amazed. He stood up.

"Upon my word, sir——" he began.

But a rapid change came over Matthew Enderby. He stretched out both arms with a sudden convulsive gesture, as though he was pushing away from him an actual and visible presence.

"Ah!" he cried hoarsely. "Good God! what—what's this?"

Then he fell back heavily against the pillows. The old terrier awoke with a start, and uttering a low whimpering howl, its hair bristling, and its tail between its legs, crouched shivering up against the high footboard of the bedstead.

Dr. Symes came from the window again. He bent down over his patient, and laid his hand on his wrist for a few seconds in silence.

"The end has come even sooner than I had anticipated, Mr. Enderby," he said at last, looking up at Jack, who stood waiting.

The doctor turned his head and glanced at the dog cowering down at the foot of the bed.

"Singular," he said, half aloud, and with a slight lifting of the eyebrows, "very singular indeed."

Meanwhile, Philip Enderby, the subject of the foregoing conversation, waited, with what patience he could muster, downstairs, hoping for a summons to his father's bedside. It was melancholy work enough, pacing up and down the gloomy panelled saloon, with its tall rectangular windows, and dark old-fashioned

furniture, in the dim twilight. The room had that indescribable odour and chill about it which is wont to haunt rarely used chambers. The outlook from the window was certainly ill-calculated to dispel the depressing influences that reigned within. The white fog hung low and dense over the river, and crept up the sloping lawns towards the house. A black mass of trees—oaks and beeches—rose out of it just by the bend of the stream on the left; and beyond the long flat stretch of the park faded away into misty uncertainty under the growing darkness.

After many years of absence this was hardly a cheerful home-coming for Colonel Enderby. The place seemed full of ghosts, and ghosts are rarely good company. The Colonel had come back longing for peace, hoping for a final reconciliation which might wipe out bitter memories of the past; but as one half-hour after another slipped by without sound or movement in the large house, and as the evening deepened towards the night, his hopes died slowly and sadly away, and deep disappointment and regret possessed him.

For Philip, though he had knocked about the world more than most men, and was by no means a weak or over-sentimental person, had a great singleness of purpose, and the keenness of feeling which almost invariably goes with singleness of purpose. His experience of life had been of a somewhat stern and practical nature, making demands upon the more sturdy masculine virtues, and giving but small opportunity for delicate self-analysis or self-culture. Yet there was a very genuine vein of poetry in him too—a clinging in thought to this same old home, a deep desire for re-union with his father and his family, a

great capacity for enjoyment of the gentler, quieter, more domestic sides of life. Perhaps the Colonel's reverence for natural, simple, homely joys had only been deepened by a certain denial and thwarting of desire that had befallen him. His emotions were none the less vivid because, so far, they had been voiceless and unsatisfied, kept in check by the hand of unpropitious circumstance.

He had, among other tendencies which people will praise or blame according to their own taste in such matters, an almost quixotic indifference to his own material advantage. Hearing of old Mr. Enderby's serious illness, he came to Bassett, not impelled by any desire to secure a possibly forfeited inheritance, but with the simple purpose of entreating for pardon and for a renewal of affection, before death should have made all such renewal impossible. Good-natured Jack Enderby, with his handsome wife and herd of noisy children, might move over from the ramshackle rectory house at Cold Enderby, and reign at Bassett in peace and plenty, and Philip would bear them no grudge in the future. All he begged for was an assurance that he was no longer an outcast, unforgiven, perhaps even forgotten, without place or part in his father's memory. But as time drew on, while the Colonel paced to and fro, stern and silent, in the cold, dusky saloon downstairs, he knew that all hope of reconciliation grew fainter and fainter. He felt sick at heart.

At last there was a sound of footsteps crossing the hall, and of two men talking just outside. Colonel Enderby drew himself up rather stiffly, and stood waiting in the middle of the room.

Dr. Symes entered first, composed and professional, limping slightly, and making a little stumping noise with his gold-headed walking-stick.

"If I might order my carriage immediately, my dear Mr. Enderby, I should be extremely glad," he said, turning to Jack, who followed him into the room. "If you will kindly permit me I will ring at once," he added, moving across as he spoke to the fireplace.

The two other men were left standing opposite to each other. Colonel Enderby looked hard at his younger brother; but it was too dark for him to make out the expression of his face.

"Well?" he asked rather hoarsely.

"My dear fellow, it's all over," answered Jack, in a broken voice.

The Colonel bowed his head. There was a silence for some minutes. Then Jack Enderby did an extremely unromantic thing. The long watching, and the final scene upstairs had upset him considerably, and his taste at no time was over-refined. He was conscious, too, that his troubles in the way of delivering disagreeable messages was by no means yet over. He poured himself out a couple of glasses of sherry, from a decanter that stood on one of the bare tables, and gulped them down hastily one after the other. His hand shook a good deal; he felt all to pieces, so to speak.

Dr. Symes glanced at him and then at the Colonel, who waited, erect and silent. Notwithstanding certain superficial affections and vanities, Mortimer Symes was an eminently kind-hearted man. He was also, as has already been stated, a pretty shrewd observer and something of a diplomatist. He never could see the

object of telling people truths of an unpalatable description unless it was absolutely necessary to do so. Just now he perceived that Jack Enderby was screwing up his courage with a view to blurting out information calculated to give acute pain to the living, and reflect no small discredit upon the dead. He decided to intervene.

"The end was extremely sudden, Colonel Enderby," he said, folding his arms, and speaking with that fulness of utterance which argues distinct satisfaction on the part of the speaker and the sound of his own voice. "A long period of coma, followed by a brief interval of consciousness—the mind even then considerably clouded. An inclination to dwell on the past,—reminiscences of former friendships and interests, an awaking of early impressions, but no active appreciation of immediate surroundings. A momentary flash of the old remarkable vigour, and then," added Dr. Symes, extending his hand with a slow downward movement, "a final quenching of the light. Your brother naturally was greatly affected. Even a man like myself, whose professional duties so often bring scenes of this nature before him, could hardly remain entirely unmoved. I need not enlarge on the subject to you, Colonel Enderby, who must so frequently have witnessed death in its most distressing forms, the horror of it aggravated by hideous and repulsive surroundings. Familiarity fails to rob death of its terrors. But I own I am greatly relieved," he continued, with a relapse into an easier conversational manner—"sincerely relieved. With your father's remarkably strong constitution, I had feared a painful struggle at the last. I am thankful to say we were spared anything of that kind."

The Colonel bowed a sort of general assent to the worthy doctor's statements. It would be indelicate, he felt, to ask for intimate explanations before a third person. His native reticence, and an innate dignity which belonged to him, put all further inquiries out of the question.

Jack, meanwhile, was not slow to perceive the way of escape which Dr. Symes' discourse had opened to him. He stifled any conscientious scruples that assailed him.

"I did what I could, Philip," he said, in a slightly apologetic tone. "But it was just as Dr. Symes says. My father wasn't quite himself, you know. He was wandering a good deal, and one couldn't make him understand anything out of the common run."

"No, no; of course not," replied Colonel Enderby.

He spoke as thoroughly accepting the position, and even setting the matter aside; but there was a sharp bitterness at his heart. He was repulsed. His last chance was gone. Philip was not without a measure of pride. He turned away, walked across to the window, and stood looking out into the misty twilight, while the doctor indulged in a series of appropriate and somewhat wordy reflections, to which Jack answered with incoherent monosyllables.—His father was dead, and in dying had given no sign. He himself was unpardoned. The injustice of the thing, as well as the sorrow of it, cried out in Philip Enderby. He could not bring himself to remain in a house where his coming had been so unwelcome. He turned away from the window, went up and spoke to his brother.

"I must get back to Aldershot to-night," he said quietly. "I suppose I can catch the night mail at

Slowby. I'll come down for the funeral, of course, if you'll let me know the day and hour."

"Oh! but you know, my dear fellow——" began Jack Enderby.

The Colonel interrupted him.

"All right," he said. "I know you're very kind, Jack; but, under the circumstances, I had better go all the same, thanks."

CHAPTER II.

"VIVE LE ROI!"

ON the morning after his father's funeral Philip Enderby was up and out early. He had passed a night in his old home for the first time for over twenty years, and sleep had been difficult of attainment. There was very much to think about; much that was painful; difficult to forgive; to submit to patiently. A sense of unjust wrong is not an agreeable bedfellow. The Colonel was glad enough when the light of a stormy dawn began to glimmer in through his window shutters; he would get up and go out, and try to find good counsel out of doors.

He went downstairs and out on to the head of the steps in front of the door. The old wire-haired terrier got up from his place on the tiger-skin before the hearth in the hall, and trotted out after him. The dog seemed anxious for notice; he put his forepaws up against the balustrade and forced his grey muzzle up into Colonel Enderby's hand with a certain air of inquiry. The old master was gone; was this the new

one? The Colonel looked down and patted the dog's head for a minute; then he drew himself up and took a deep breath of the keen moist air. His heart was very full just then.

"I am afraid I am a bit of a fool," he said, half ashamed of his own emotion. "I suppose I didn't know how much I cared for the place till it came to a question of giving it up altogether. It cuts one a little at first."

The gaudy beauty of a wild autumn morning was upon Bassett Darcy. The sky was clear after a night of rain and wind; a thin, watery blue above, and below almost white, with a flare of yellow light along the eastern horizon. A broken procession of light grey clouds—called of country weather-prophets by the ominous name of "messengers"—streamed up from the westward and straggled, ragged and dirty, across a bank of darker cloud stretching behind the uplands of Priors Bassett. The trees, roughly stripped of their coloured leaves by the night's storm, were black with wet and glistened in the sunshine, the coarse grass of the open park looking a raw green. The wind, chill with rain, blew the rooks and jackdaws hither and thither, as they left the wood overhanging the bend of the sluggish river down behind the house. Somewhere among the shrubbery, under shelter of the high red-brick wall of the gardens on the left, a robin was singing a tender lament for the dead summer and for the pain and cold of the long bleak coming winter.

There were sounds, too, from the large block of stable buildings on the right. The murmur of voices, the impatient stamp of a horse, the rattling of pails

and tinkle of falling water, and now and again a few bars of some tune, whistled shrilly, came to Colonel Enderby's ears, as he stood there looking silently at the strange yet familiar scene. Memories of his mother, of his childhood, of quaint games and imaginings, when the wood by the river was shrouded in delightful mystery, and the river itself seemed full of unknown danger and of promise; when the flower-garden was a sweet enchanted region, and when every natural object possessed a spirit and personality of its own, to be approached with wonder and reverence; when gardeners and grooms too seemed wise with all manner of occult wisdom, men who had a tight grip on fundamental facts, and were not to be deluded by mere appearances; when the keeper, in his gaiters and brown velveteen coat, with pockets big enough to hold a couple of retriever puppies, appeared a wild and daring character, fascinating, yet somewhat alarming also, thanks to his careless disregard of animal life and profound experience in the matter of vermin.—Memories such as these, impressions and associations which had slumbered for years, awoke now in Colonel Enderby. Yes, it is all there, all that has ever befallen us, written with some mysterious kind of sympathetic ink upon the heart and conscience, and needing merely the faded touch which shall restore to the invisible characters their original legibility, and make us live our past lives over once more in pleasure or in pain.

He went down the stone steps, round the end of the great square house, and along the wide gravel terrace with the shrubberies on one hand and the sloping lawns on the other. He had wandered there

years ago, on sleepy summer evenings, with his gentle, sweet-faced mother, telling her in shy, half-awkward fashion the story of his first love and of Miss Cecilia Murray's many perfections, while Mr. Enderby sat over his wine in the large dining-room indoors, and the last glow of the sunset faded behind the distant woods.

In that pool yonder, under the alder stump, he caught a two-pound perch in the Easter holidays, the year he went to Harrow; and there was the place, just where the bank shelves into the water, among the rushes and broad dock-leaves, now sere and withered with the chill of autumn, that he and Matt had seen a couple of water-rats, one Sunday, after afternoon service, and that Spot, the old water spaniel, had missed the last one by a couple of inches. And there:—but the tale would be endless. Each path and bush and flower-bed had its history, simple, yet vivid, sad or merry of remembrance.

And since those far-off yet unforgotten times, the little, ugly, red-legged, blue-eyed boy had grown into a man; had wandered far and wide, had seen strange sights, and passed through strange experiences; his gentle mother had lain these many years sleeping in the churchyard on the hill above; his first love, the fair Cecilia, had married the not too reputable son of an Irish peer, and had drifted away along some quite other road across the land of this life; the old Squire, obstinate and tyrannical to the last, was dead. Philip Enderby himself was middle-aged. He supposed that he had outlived most of his hopes and illusions; and yet the old home was just the same as ever. The rooks still clamoured as they left their nests, and the

fish rose in the lazy stream; robins sang plaintively among the shrubs, men whistled over their work in the stable yard, and the rich, damp, clay soil smelt strong and fresh under the morning sunshine. The individual changes, drops away, and dies, his place knows him no more. Yet nature can always find another bird to sing the old song, and the wind blows as it will through all the long years, and the land wakes glad and fragrant at the kiss of the pale dawn, and plain daily labour goes on steadily, unheedingly, from generation to generation. Birds will sing, stable buckets clatter, and grooms whistle, so one fancies at times, just as usual on the morning of the Last Day itself.

Colonel Enderby, with the old white terrier trotting solemnly at his heels, paced slowly up and down the long walk, thinking of these things. One of the under-gardeners sweeping fallen leaves and twigs off the smooth gravel, stopped his work as he passed by, and took a good long stare at the Colonel. "He'd heered," as he told his wife that evening over his supper, "a'ready, as Mr. Jack Enderby was come into it all; but he felt he'd like to know what sort of a looking gentleman the other one was, considering the old Squire was so terrible spiteful agin' him."

Perhaps we may as well take a good look at Philip Enderby, too, as he moves along under the garden front of the stately house in the wind and the morning sunshine, and see what manner of man he is—outwardly, at all events. I am afraid it must be owned frankly, at starting, that he is not at all an obviously romantic figure. The Colonel is turned eight-and-forty, and is not unprosperous looking—facts

calculated, in the estimation of most persons, to knock all prospects of romance effectually on the head! Further, it must be owned that at no period of his life has he been reckoned a handsome man. All the same, there is a certain air of distinction about him. He is rather over middle height; well made and well set-up—broad across the chest and small round the loins; and possessing, too, even in the undress of a rough shooting-coat and heavy boots, that effect of spotless freshness and cleanliness that is one of the most notable characteristics of a well-bred Englishman. His features are somewhat large and strongly marked; the nose aquiline, the mouth hidden under a heavy light-brown moustache, the ends of which the Colonel has a habit of pulling downwards in meditative fashion whenever he has anything a little on his mind. His jaw is square and solid; his complexion originally fair, but now tanned and dulled by travel and exposure. His crisp short hair, a darker brown by some two shades than his moustache, is as thick as ever, and still untouched with grey—a fact which, though he is far from being vain, does certainly yield him considerable satisfaction.

Philip Enderby's eyes are the only point in his personal appearance meriting unqualified praise. They are deep-set under straight eyebrows—real fighting eyes of bright blue; the pupil small, the iris large and peculiarly rich and clear in colour. Such eyes are habitually kind and friendly enough; but they can grow very keen and ruthless when the blood is hot and an ugly day's work has to be done. And our friend here has seen an ugly day's work done more than once in his life. He has seen more than most

men's share of battle and horror and death. He looked at them steadily, not without quick movements of pitying wonder and disgust; but chiefly with a stern sense of his own immediate duty, which was to put through the work in hand simply, and even cheerfully, without any careful hesitation or speculation concerning the ultimate ethics of the situation.—This last sentence seems to imply something of harshness and cruelty, I fear; but it may be questioned whether any man will be of much active use in the world who has not a residuum of brutality left in him. In any case, it is certain that in some natures, along with a dash of harshness and cruelty—if one must needs employ such unlovely terms—goes tenderness of heart towards the weak and unfortunate, delicate consideration for friend or kinsman, and a devotion towards chosen individuals so profound and constant that it is almost perilous in its intensity.

The man of this temper who loves—still more, who loves late—will do it with a terrible completeness. Strength has its dangers as well as weakness. They are touched with dignity and splendour, it is true; but they are too often touched as well with a species of desperation. These simple whole-hearted natures, under the dominion of a fixed idea, are horribly difficult to cope with. Nothing turns them aside. They will go through fire and water, utterly regardless of the well-intentioned remonstrances of the bystanders, to reach the goal, whatever it may be.

In saying this, I do not mean for an instant to suggest that this quiet, dignified, and, alas! middle-aged soldier, Colonel Enderby, was at all disposed just now to run mad upon love or any other matter.

The potential possibilities of a character may never be developed in a given direction; but, thanks to circumstances, may remain latent to the end. Far from indulging in exaggeration of feeling or intention, he was calmly making up his mind to accept the inevitable; to part with a hope that, though but half-formulated, had been very dear to him; to retire gracefully from a difficult position; and not only conceal, but, if possible, even forget his own disappointment and injury.

For the Colonel paced up and down that bright morning in front of the house at Bassett Darcy, not as master, but as guest. Old Mr. Enderby had bequeathed all his property—houses, lands, plate, and other possessions—to the younger of his two surviving sons. Philip only inherited that which would have come to him had his elder brother, Matthew, lived—two-thirds of his mother's fortune and a sum of money left, in remainder, to him by name, in his grandfather's will. He would no longer be a poor man, it is true; but to some persons, even the assurance that in future they are secure of a comfortable balance at their bankers' will not wholly compensate for the subjective discomfort of knowing themselves to be the objects of an undying grudge. This public and practical repudiation on the part of his father was hard to bear. His pride rebelled against it, as well as his heart; and it was not without a struggle that the Colonel schooled himself into acquiescence.

As he stood still in the middle of the broad walk, looking away over the river to the wood and the levels of the grass park beyond, something very like tears came into his eyes. There was a depth of very

wholesome humanity in the man. It would have been pleasant to him to settle down here, with a wife and children—as Jack was about to do, for instance—to see another generation growing up about him, full of hope and generous ambition; to move on, surrounded by kindly, faithful faces and honest love, towards the inevitable, but undreaded close. He could not help feeling, rather sadly, that he had missed a good deal in life. It was dreary work looking at all this established security and order from the point of view of a homeless old bachelor. Colonel Enderby shook himself, with a queer smile, and turned back to the house again.

“Ah! well, it’s no good quarrelling with facts,” he said, half aloud. “We all get what we’re best fitted for in the long run, I suppose; and it doesn’t pay to cry over spilt milk. Come along, Vic”—to the terrier, who sat on the gravel, still contemplating him with an air of inquiry—“I’m going indoors, like a sensible fellow, to my breakfast.”

Mr. Jack Enderby, meanwhile, notwithstanding that at this moment Fortune appeared to woo him with her broadest smiles, was in an unhappy frame of mind. Not that he was troubled with importunate memories, or perplexed by the indifference of universal nature to the fate of the individual or any such high or intimate matter. Jack was safely rooted in the conventional and commonplace, and his perturbations were of a purely concrete order. But he was entirely unaccustomed to feeling more than one thing at a time, and just now he was a prey to many conflicting sensations. He found it dreadfully confusing. Jack’s conscience did not accuse him. He knew that he

had brought no undue influence to bear on his father regarding the disposition of the property; yet still he was painfully aware of embarrassment and discomfort in his elder brother's presence. Not possessing any morbid or ascetic views concerning the inherent value of suffering, it seemed to him a little too bad that he should be so extremely uncomfortable when he was quite innocent of wrong-doing.

He had come to the conclusion the day before that it was incumbent upon him to make Colonel Enderby a handsome and appropriate speech on the subject of the property. But the house had been full of people; there had been a good deal of movement and stir, and, after the funeral, a tendency in the direction of wine and cold baked meats, and general conversation in a rising scale of cheerfulness. Mr. Peter Gamage, the lawyer from Slowby, had stayed to dinner. So had Dr. Symes—not that the latter gentleman had any intention of being bracketed socially with a country solicitor. He stayed for reasons of his own. He happened to have heard some dramatic stories of those terrible years of the Indian Mutiny, and he was anxious to make nearer acquaintance with a man who had been a not undistinguished actor in them. Dr. Symes had remained, talking to the Colonel, till late. There had really been no favourable opening for Jack Enderby's speech; and as he was not by any means glib, unless he lost his temper, and as he stood in mortal fear of fine talking and heroics, he had not tried very hard to find an opening, since none presented itself unsought.

Now this morning the prospect of that same speech hung over him like a dark and dreadful shadow, while

at the same time he was conscious of an elation so lively that it made him wash, put on his boots, and even tie his white tie—Mr. Enderby had an instinct that it would be graceful to emphasize the outward and visible signs of his clerical profession at this juncture—in time to a dashing triumphal march which kept on thumping itself out in his brain.

“Matt can go to Eton,” he thought, “and the girls can have new frocks whenever they want them. Bates says there’s no end of first-rate wine in the cellars; and Augusta will look uncommonly well in those diamonds of my poor dear mother’s.”

Then he checked himself; grew suddenly serious, thought of Jacob and the birth-right, and of the nasty consequences in some ways of his misappropriation of Esau’s blessing; and then of the virtues of the law of entail, and of the sacred institution of primogeniture—for Jack Enderby was a devout Conservative.

“Every stick and stone on the estate shall be strictly entailed on Matt at once,” he said, rather illogically.

He pictured the nice string of hunters he would have in those great barrack-like stables before the year was out; then made another return upon his brother, and wondered what on earth he should say to him.

When the breakfast bell rang at last, poor Mr. Enderby felt anything but gay. The triumphal march died away into silence, and he would have sacrificed a good deal of prospective pleasure in the matter of wine and horses to have avoided the next half-hour.

As Jack, with rather a rueful countenance, came down into the square flagged hall, the Colonel entered it by the front door, letting a great rush of fresh

westerly wind into the house with him. He came forward, holding out his hand to his brother, and looking him very frankly and kindly in the face. There was a fine serenity in his expression as he did so.

"Good morning, Jack," he said. "I've been round the dear old place. I'm glad to find that with all the knocking about the world that I've had, I have not forgotten a single thing here. It seems as if I hadn't been away a day."

He paused a moment, and then added quickly.

"God bless you, Jack, you and your wife, and the children! Good luck to you, and your boys after you; they're jolly, plucky little lads, and will keep up the honour of the old name gallantly."

Colonel Enderby turned away, and went across the hall to lay down his hat.

"You'll give me a bed now and then," he said, "won't you, if I want to get away from soldiering, and have a breath of my native air?"

Jack Enderby was touched, distressed, relieved, all at the same moment. The number and diversity of his emotions did not tend towards lucidity of thought or expression.

"Upon my word," he began, "I don't know what on earth to say to you, my dear fellow. I am in the most awfully awkward position, you know. I've been wanting to speak to you seriously ever since this all came out about the property. It isn't right, you know. It's infernally hard on you, though I don't want to say anything disrespectful about my poor father, of course. But, you know, he was very high-handed with me; there was no getting near certain subjects. He was as close and reticent as could be about money matters.

I give you my word I hadn't a notion till the day he died of the way he meant to leave things, and even then he only gave me a hint. I don't understand it. I tell you, I don't know how to look you in the face. I feel like—well, upon my word, I don't know what I do feel like," he added hopelessly. "It's most uncommonly awkward for me, and your taking it all in this wonderfully generous sort of way makes it all the worse, that it does."

Jack's voice grew a little shaky. He was genuinely moved, though his form of utterance was, it must be allowed, somewhat elementary.

The Colonel came across from the table on which he had laid down his hat. His brother's incoherent address had pleased him, and strengthened his willingness to accept the situation unreservedly.

"It's all perfectly right as it is," he answered. "You're cut out for a country squire, Jack—it will suit you a good deal better than preaching, eh? And Augusta is just fit for this sort of thing too. After all, what do I want with a great barrack of a house and an army of servants? There, we quite understand each other, and needn't say any more about it. By the way," he said presently, "it seems to me there is no end of keep on South Park, just across the river, simply wasting. I should put eighteen or twenty beasts on it at once, if I was in your place. I suspect you'll find the estate wants a lot of looking after at first. Things must have been a good deal neglected, since my father's not been able to get about and see into them himself."

Then the two men went into the dining-room, chatting of stock, and horses, and draining, and

kindred subjects. And by the time breakfast was over, the triumphal march was thumping away as merrily as ever again in Jack Enderby's head.

That evening as he stood smoking meditatively, with his back to the library fire, the Colonel said—

“I think I shall get long leave, Jack, and go abroad for a time, when all this business is finally settled. I dare say Edmund Drake would go with me. You know, after all, I have seen next to nothing of Europe.”

He turned round and steadied a big log that threatened to fall out on to the hearth with his foot.

“I feel as pleased as a schoolboy,” he went on, “at having some money in my pocket to play ducks and drakes with.”

CHAPTER III.

RETROSPECTIVE.

A BRILLIANT American writer has told us that in order to acquire a really comprehensive and scientific understanding of the personality of any given man or woman, it would be necessary to go back to the garden of Eden, and, beginning with our first parents, to trace the gradual evolution of the individual specimen down through the ages, from the cradle of the human race to the present day. This, doubtless, is strictly true. It is, therefore, all the more a matter for devout thankfulness, that such a course is hedged about with obvious impossibility; for were it not so, there is no saying to what gigantic proportions the biography of

the most obscure and uninteresting person might reach! Let me hasten to assure the reader that it is not for an instant proposed in the present case to peer into the backward abysm of things in this alarmingly voluminous and tedious manner, in the hope of therein discerning the ultimate causes of present effects. The narrator only desires, with all attainable brevity and conciseness, to make a few statements which may serve to throw some light upon the fortunes and conduct of certain actors in this little drama.

When Philip Enderby was about two-and-twenty an event took place which very sensibly affected his subsequent career. He discovered one fine day that he was very deeply in love—in love, too, with a young lady whose fortune would be pretty well enclosed by the trunks in which she packed her modest *trousseau*. The young man's tastes were neither showy nor expensive. He had, in fact, been blamelessly economical, eking out his pay as subaltern in a marching regiment, with the slender sum allowed him, rather grudgingly, by his father, and never forestalling quarter-day with inopportune demands for advances. Now he intimated that an increase of allowance would enable him to marry, and that he wanted to marry very much indeed.

But, unfortunately for poor Philip, he was not, and never had been, a favourite with his father, whose stock of parental affection was rather exclusively bestowed upon his eldest son, Matthew, a handsome, headstrong, blustering fellow. Young Matt had left the university, where he had distinguished himself more in sporting and athletic than in learned circles, very much in debt. His father had just cleared him,

so that Philip's love affair and request for help came at a singularly inconvenient season. In vulgar terms, Mr. Enderby didn't see it at all.

"What did that silly fellow, Philip, want with a wife and a houseful of squalling brats at his age?" he asked. "The boy hadn't half enough to do, kicking his heels at one garrison town after another. A little good hard work was what he wanted; that would knock the calf-love out of him soon enough. And then, who the devil is this Miss Cecilia Murray?" he added, not over-civilly. "I never heard of her. Let Philip take up with some girl with money, in the county, whom we know something about, and then it'll be plenty of time to talk about increased allowances, and so on. If they're so much in love, let 'em wait; that's the only thing I can recommend to 'em."

Lieutenant Enderby and Cecilia Murray proceeded to wait. Poor dears! there was nothing else very possible for them to do under the circumstances, since they were really attached to each other. They waited dutifully during the space of a year. Then the young lady began to lose her good looks a little. She was one of those thin, under-vitalized blondes who do not wear very well. It became daily more evident that waiting did not agree with her physically, though the constancy of her heart might be as great as ever. It was a pity, for Philip was blessed with a large share of patient devotion. He could have waited faithfully for a dozen years for his Cecilia, and sworn at the end of it that she was every bit as pretty as the first day he met her.

Cecilia Murray's mother, however, was a lady of experience, of resources, and of an eminently practical

turn of mind. Her own marriage had not been exactly a conspicuous success, since her husband had added to various other incapacities the incapacity for living long, and had left his wife, as a still young and handsome woman, with a family of portionless daughters on her hands. Mrs. Murray permitted herself no illusions in certain matters. She had realized with disagreeable distinctness that, in the case of a girl having little besides personal attractions to recommend her, time is of supreme value on this side of five-and-twenty.

"With Cecilia's style of looks, freshness is everything," she said, with praiseworthy candour.

Acting upon this conviction the good lady did not warmly encourage her daughter's lover, whose material prospects struck her as lacking in any brilliant promise. She treated the young man with scant courtesy, and had, in fact, prepared to break off the match altogether, when an unlooked-for occurrence caused her suddenly to alter her opinion as to the eligibility of his suit.

It was in the winter-time that young Matthew Enderby, troubled about money matters and thirsty for some fresh amusement, elected to come to the quaint cathedral town in the north, where his brother's regiment was then quartered, and spend a week with him. Matt was in very low water again; his debts were heavy, and he could not make up his mind to tell his father frankly about them. Between horses and dogs, billiards and racing, and little runs up to London, the young gentleman had contrived to get his affairs into a sufficiently desperate condition. The Squire's temper was short at times even with his eldest

and best-loved son; and Matt neither relished the idea of embarking in a slightly discreditable confession, or of risking his position of first favourite with his father. He was in the state of mind in which a man is willing to clutch at remote and improbable chances of salvation. Philip was devoted to him, he knew. Philip was a generous fellow and might be able to help him. At worst, Philip could be coaxed into breaking the whole thing to his mother—whose darling he was—and through her Matt might get the assistance he wanted without the unpleasantness of a personal statement. Filled with these vague hopes and round-about intentions, he started on his pilgrimage to the northern city; but once there the desire to cut a figure, win admiration, and get himself talked about, returned upon him to the exclusion of more prudent considerations. The week of his stay extended itself into three, and during those three weeks Matthew Enderby might certainly congratulate himself on having made a mark—of a kind.

One night, or rather, early one morning, the two brothers, and a young fellow-officer of Philip's, Beaumont Pierce-Dawnay, by name, were returning from a somewhat uproarious bachelor's dinner-party at a neighbouring country-house. Matt had taken more wine than was good for him; he had played cards and lost heavily. He was excited and angry, and tried to carry off his uncomfortable sensations by an extra amount of swagger and bluster. When the high two-wheeled dog-cart, in which the three young men were going to drive back, came to the door, Beau Pierce-Dawnay said, with a significant glance, to Philip—

"You'd better drive, old man. You're the steadiest of the lot, and that horse is a nasty vicious brute, and stumbles into the bargain."

But Matthew chose to regard this as an unwarrantable act of interference. He was in the humour to pick a quarrel with any one, and the other man's imperturbable good-temper had been a source of irritation to him all the evening. With some insolence, he said he had hired the trap himself; he knew very well what he was about; he had driven out, and he was going to drive back again. If Mr. Pierce-Dawnay was afflicted with nervousness he could walk, as far as he, Matt, was concerned, and welcome.

Beau, however, was far from quarrelsome; he got up behind the dog-cart with a good-natured laugh.

"Oh! I don't care a rap," he said. "I can stick on here tight enough. If the horse comes down, you and Philip 'll get the broken necks, you know, not I."

This speech did not tend to soothe Matthew Enderby. The horse justified the evil opinion given of it, and the young man, half from recklessness, half from temper, drove wildly, and frightened and fretted the ill-conditioned animal into a perfect fever. At last, at the top of a long, steep hill, Matt lost all patience, and flung the reins petulantly to his brother.

"There, catch hold," he cried. "I shall get mad and cut the brute to pieces in a minute. I want to light my pipe. Hold him up, you fool! what are you at, letting him gander about the road in that fashion?"

Philip caught hold of the reins as best he could; but the slap of them on the horse's back, as Matt

threw them to him, had thoroughly scared it. The horse bolted. Philip was almost helpless; he was sitting low, and driving from the wrong side too; he could not get any purchase on the horse's mouth. Matt, perceiving the danger, made a clutch at the reins again, with an oath, and succeeded in giving a violent wrench to the right hand one. The horse swerved, crossed its fore legs, and came down like a lump of lead on the hard frosty road.

The next thing Philip remembered was standing out in the roadway, with Pierce-Dawnay by him. He was not much hurt himself, but an indefinable dread was upon him. He went over to the further side of the broken-down carriage. There was a great heap of stones on the grass by the roadway,—and across the heap, just where the light of the lamp fell, lay poor young Matthew Enderby. He would never swagger, or play cards, or get into debt again, in this world.

Some grief is unapproachable; it resists sympathy almost as an insult, and nurses itself in black silence and gloom. So it was with the Squire. He did not say much about his son's death, but he brooded over it in heavy speechless wretchedness. He could not accustom his mind to it; he had a sense of unpardonable injury and wrong. The house at Bassett became a sad place. Jack was up at college, and he went home as little as possible, though the fact of his being blessed by nature with many characteristics of the true Enderby type made his presence rather welcome than otherwise to his father. Towards Philip the Squire felt with deep unreasoning bitterness. The thought that this boy, for whom he had never cared greatly, who did not resemble the rest of the family

either in looks or in temperament, would take his dashing elder brother's place, was hateful to him. Heretofore Philip had been simply uninteresting to his father; he was uninteresting no longer, he was obnoxious. If one of the two lads must go, why had not Fate selected him? The Squire could have spared him well enough, if it came to that.

Meanwhile, Philip himself was half broken-hearted. Death, in kindly fashion, rubs out the remembrance of past faults and follies, and leaves generally a fair and gracious picture of those we have loved. Their virtues seem altogether their own, and their vices no vital or integral part of them, but merely an unsightly smirch easily washed away and obliterated. Ever since the days when Matt's tin soldiers invariably won glorious victories on the floor of the Bassett Darcy nursery, over his own unsuccessful squadrons, lying prone and scattered on the ground, Philip had always admired his handsome, headstrong elder brother, and yielded him the first place willingly, even gladly. It was horrible that Matt, who was so brilliant and taking, who promised to support the family name in such an open-handed manner, who enjoyed life so vastly, should have been snatched away thus at a moment's notice.

But people were kind to Philip in his distress. Mrs. Murray, notably, was far kinder than she had ever been before. Her affection seemed to rise with extraordinary rapidity from zero to boiling-point. She welcomed him to her house, and quite advertized the fact of her daughter's engagement. Perhaps our friend Philip was pitiaibly inexperienced in those days. He accepted Mrs. Murray's attentions with the warmest

gratitude, while it never occurred to him to inquire as to the root from which they might spring.

Mrs. Murray's affection, however, was tempered with astuteness. As time passed by, she began again to cast a doubtful eye on the young man's pretensions. He was in all probability secure of a good position and large fortune now; but then, his father—as far as Mrs. Murray could make out—was the sort of man who might live for ever. Meanwhile, Cecilia had other admirers. The good lady weighed the bird in the hand against the birds in the bush; and, unless the former should develop sudden and unexpected plumpness, felt it would be advisable to relinquish her hold on it, and employ both hands in trying to catch one of those other birds that were still at liberty. She announced one day, to the young man's surprise, that she had really given him time enough; it looked bad for a girl to be hanging on with a long uncertain engagement like this; Mr. Enderby must shilly-shally no longer; Cecilia, poor dear child, was growing wretchedly worn and peaky; Mr. Enderby must marry her at once, on a good income—"such an income as will be in keeping with your position and prospects, you know"—or not at all.

Philip was a good deal startled, both by the announcement itself, and the tone in which it was conceived. There was one clause in it, notably, that offended both his taste and good feeling. Still he was very much in love. He wrote home to his mother to say he was coming, and then went down to Bassett resolved to renew his request to his father.

As long as he lived he remembered the events of that evening with painful distinctness. The dinner

was not a cheerful one. The Squire was moody, and hardly spoke, except to give an order to the servants. Mrs. Enderby, with gentle tact and self-sacrificing sweetness, tried to ignore her husband's surly pre-occupation and to talk as usual; but she was nervous, and the conversation sank away again into anxious silence. Philip found his father's manner anything but reassuring; as the saying is, his heart was in his mouth.

When Mrs. Enderby had left the dining-room, Philip told his little story—told it in a modest, quiet, manly way. There was a trace of pathos in the young man's bearing as he pleaded his cause, which some hearers would have found affecting. But Mr. Enderby was not easily affected. He turned his chair sideways, leaned his elbow on the table, and answered Philip over his shoulder, without taking the trouble to look at him.

"I told you my opinion of this foolish business of yours two years ago," he said; "it hasn't changed."

"You told us to wait, sir, and we have waited," answered Philip.

Mr. Enderby put his hand on the decanter standing by him, and refilled his glass.

"And the girl's got tired of waiting, I suppose—thinks you can ask for whatever you like now and get it; and you think the same, no doubt. You're in a pretty hurry, I dare say, to step into your dead brother's shoes."

"You've no right to say that, sir," flashed out Philip, hotly. "I've given you no cause for such a supposition. Such a thought never entered my head, or hers either. She was good enough to care for me

long ago, when certainly nobody could accuse her affection of being mercenary."

"I'm glad to hear it," returned the elder man slowly. "It's as well you should know just where you stand. If you thought your brother's death would improve your prospects, you were mistaken, that's all. It won't make a penny's difference to you, while I live."

Mr. Enderby swallowed down his glass of port, and then broke out suddenly and violently—

"But for you, Matt might have been alive now. You were drunk!"

Philip set his teeth hard. He went as white as the table-cloth before him.

"I don't drink, sir," he said, "and you know it. I was as sober as I am at this moment. Pierce-Dawnay was with us; he told you so at the time."

"Pierce-Dawnay was your friend, not Matt's. What proof have I that he didn't try to make the best of a bad job, and say what he could to shield you?"

"He's my friend, as you say; but he is a gentleman all the same, sir. He is not in the habit of telling lies."

How far sullen brooding grief had really perverted Matthew Enderby's reason, and made him harbour ugly suspicions against his son; how far he was merely actuated by a bullying desire to pain and humiliate the young man, it would be difficult to determine. Probably the two causes were too subtly mixed to be capable of separation. He sunk his head on his breast, and spoke with brutal deliberation.

"So much the worse for you, then, if you were sober. That doesn't put your conduct in a better

light, as far as I can see. You can drive well enough when it pays you to drive well."

Philip sprang up from his place and came round in front of his father. His expression was full of uncontrollable amazement and horror.

"What on earth do you mean, sir?" he cried. "What are you daring to hint at? Do you know what a dastardly thing your words seem to imply?"

Mr. Enderby looked up at him without raising his head. His dull eyes were blood-shot and his face flushed with passion as he answered:—

"By God! I tell you some people would say you knew very well what you were about when you pitched Matt out on to that cursed heap of stones. This is a fine property, and you were my second son. Foul play has been heard of for a lighter stake than that before now."

Some ten minutes later Philip rushed out into the hall, letting the door slam heavily behind him. As he did so, Mrs. Enderby moved forward in the firelight to meet him. She had been too anxious to rest by herself during this critical interview between her son and husband. She came back into the hall again, and stood near the wide open fireplace, listening with deepening fear and sorrow to the fierce voices in the dining-room.

Philip's tempest of anger died down as he caught sight of his mother. He put his arms round the frail, delicate woman in a sudden agony of tenderness.

"Come away to your room, mother," he said huskily; "I have got to say good-bye to you."

Poor Mrs. Enderby clung to him trembling.

"Oh, you have quarrelled!" she cried. "My dearest,

if you love me, go back and make it up. Remember, your father is very quick-tempered; he often says things he regrets later, when he has recovered himself. And he is very sore about dear Matt; you know how he loved him. He cannot submit to this trial; it makes him hasty and bitter. All his hopes were centred in Matt. And then, too, he has been troubled about business. He has been tried, Philip, cruelly tried and harassed. Remember all this, dear. Go and make it up with him, for my sake. If he has been a little hard with you, try to bear it—don't be stubborn, Philip; try to meet him halfway."

The young man did not answer till they had crossed the hall and entered Mrs. Enderby's little sitting-room. She stood by him, still clasping his hand, and looking with sweet piteous earnestness in his face.

"No, mother," he said; "the apology must come from him, not from me. It can't be made up unless he withdraws certain accusations he has made against me."

"Then it will never be made up," said Mrs. Enderby, in a low voice.

"He has accused me of a hideous action," Philip went on, "of something preposterous, vile, unnatural. I cannot tell you about it. I had better never have been born than have dreamed of it even for an instant."

Philip flung himself down on his knees before her, and held her about the waist, pressing his face against her gown.

"Mother, promise me that you, at least, will never doubt me; that you'll never listen to any suggestions

he throws out about me; that you will keep me in your heart of hearts; that you'll never let anything cloud your love for me. Promise me, mother, to believe in me always, before I go."

In the poor boy's weakness Mrs. Enderby found an unexpected calm and strength.

"Stand up, Philip," she said gently. She laid her hands on his shoulders, and looked deep into his blue eyes. "I believe in you completely and truly, Philip. Nothing can shake my faith in you. This is a terrible delusion that has taken possession of your father's mind, the fruit of sorrow. You must not hold him accountable for it. Thoughts take hold of us sometimes which it is as impossible to drive away as it is to rid ourselves of disease itself. But they pass after a time, and we shake off the remembrance of them as we shake off the remembrance of a wretched dream, with infinite thankfulness and relief. Please God, it may be so in this case, and that before very long you may come back to me again. Ah! you are very dear to me, Philip. You have been the stay and comfort of my life; you have been son and daughter to me, both in one."

Mrs. Enderby could not manage to say more. The two stood looking at each other a few minutes in silence. Then Philip bent down and kissed his mother, and went away.

The proverb says troubles rarely come singly. To Philip Enderby they seemed to come in legions just at this time. Mrs. Murray was pitiless; as the income was not forthcoming on the one part, the bride was not forthcoming on the other. She developed an admirable sense of duty—feared that the young man

must have behaved shamefully to his father to cause this rupture and denial. A bad son is calculated to make but a sorry husband. Cecilia's happiness must not be endangered. Mrs. Murray felt it would be both immoral and impolitic to put a premium on filial disobedience. On the highest grounds she therefore entirely refused to think of Mr. Enderby as a possible son-in-law.

So there was an end to Philip's budding romance. At one stroke he found himself bereft alike of parents, home, and mistress, and thrown upon the world as a mere soldier of fortune. With his faithful and affectionate nature, he was bound to suffer very deeply under this accumulation of misfortunes. I do not wish to draw a fancy portrait of the young man, and hold him up as a model of fortitude and virtue. On the contrary, I must admit that for a time after the final breaking off of his engagement, it seemed a little doubtful whether Philip was not determined to set out on that unprofitable journey, commonly known as "going to the bad." He was so miserable, poor fellow, that he was sorely tempted to drown misery in debauch. But, perhaps his mother's prayers, perhaps a certain innate purity and sweetness, which at bottom made riot disgusting to him, called Philip back before he had sunk very deep in the slough. He recovered his footing on the solid ground of good living, and, not without a hot sense of shame and self-reproach in face of his past aberrations, took, once and for all, to wiser courses.

Great public events, too, came at this crisis indirectly to his aid. The year 1854 saw the beginning of a war which we are now assured was highly dis-

creditable, if not actually iniquitous. Be that as it may, the fact remains—happily or unhappily, I know not which—that men may fight as gallantly in a bad cause as a good one, and that the moral effect on individuals may be as salutary when they suffer, struggle, and endure in an unjust quarrel as in a just one. Philip Enderby began to show what spirit he was truly of. He emerged, he distinguished himself. Later, during the hideous months of the Indian Mutiny, his name obtained a rather enviable notoriety. The plain slender young fellow, whose quiet ways had made him something of a butt for the wits of his regiment, developed both mentally and physically. India, for some years after the rebellion, offered brilliant opportunities to soldiers who had the wit to take advantage of them; and Philip's patience, constancy, and courage had already marked him out as a person to be entrusted with delicate or hazardous work. As the young man could not marry his love, he decided to marry his sword, and contrived, as time went on, to carve out for himself a sufficiently distinct place in the world with that somewhat uncultivated instrument.

A certain simplicity and directness of purpose never left him. But as he grew older, Philip Enderby was not a person with whom it was advisable to take a liberty. It came to be understood that some matters must not be spoken of lightly before him—a woman's reputation must not be smiled away, or a man's moral delinquencies too easily condoned. Younger men were disposed to think him a trifle too rigid in matters of virtue and religion for the entire comfort of his neighbours—a person given to slight exaggerations, stern, and not altogether easy to get on with. Yet every one

admitted that he was kindly too, a faithful friend, and a fine officer. At eight and forty the Colonel's position was acknowledged and assured. He had escaped many dangers, resisted many temptations; and as yet, perhaps fortunately for himself, he had been very true to the memory of his first love.

And Mrs. Enderby? Loving both husband and son, nothing was left her but to live by faith. But faith, unassisted by recurrent and encouraging revelations, is a lean and far from nourishing diet. Mrs. Enderby did not thrive upon it. As day after day and month after month passed by, without any change or sign of relenting on the part of the Squire towards Philip, faith began to grow weak, and Mrs. Enderby began to grow weak also. She hungered after her boy. He had been a good and gentle son to her ever since the time when, clad in a round holland pinafore and white tucked drawers, he had trotted after her up and down the long passages at Bassett Darcy, and about the sheltered, high-walled gardens, fragrant with the scent of pinks and mignonette. Later, he had never failed to scrawl her a weekly letter from school, containing an ill-spelled chronicle of rudimentary joys and sorrows. And afterwards, when he went into the army—while through many wakeful nights, in the great blue bed-room over the hall, she had wrestled in prayer for him, and agonized over those, to her, mysterious temptations that are supposed specially to beset young gentlemen of the upper classes—she had always found him come home to her, as quiet and simple and thoughtful as ever.

Only once did she venture to break the silence which her husband maintained upon the subject of

his quarrel with his son; and then the Squire's fierce, unreasoning violence terrified her into patient submission again. Mrs. Enderby could cling to her love, but she could not fight for it. As time went on, she fell into a strange habit of sitting silent and unemployed in the large, dusky saloon, overlooking the broad, smooth lawn and lazy river. She would not go out much; she shrank from meeting her neighbours, or even from stepping in and out of the cottages, with a basket of dainties on her arm, which she distributed along with the most sulphureous of tracts, and the very mildest of personal advice. Sometimes she seemed to be bewildered, and hardly to know what she was doing. Unpleasant rumours got about concerning her; people said poor Mrs. Enderby's mind was going.

Medical science, in the neat and drily attentive person of Dr. Rideout of Slowby—it was before the day of Dr. Symes and the local pre-eminence of Tullingworth—owned itself baffled. There was no organic disease discoverable, and yet the poor lady was evidently sinking.

The feeble flame of Mrs. Enderby's life flickered up fitfully whenever her husband entered the room. Hope lingers with us, and old habits assert themselves even when the sands have run very low, and the feet of the mourners are near the door. She told him that there was "nothing really the matter. She was only very weak, and would be better again in a day or so."

But the day on which Mrs. Enderby would be better never dawned. That flickering flame sank slowly down till it was quenched in darkness, and Mrs. Enderby lay dead. She had paid the penalty of too

great faith and love. Virtues should be of a strictly limited order, one sometimes fears, if they are to bring their possessors in a comfortable dividend on this side the grave.

Matthew Enderby missed his wife very keenly. He had loved her truly, according to his lights. The custom of many years had made her presence necessary to him, and her death seemed somewhat of an impertinence. It was the only independent action she had taken, save a certain tremulous support given to Philip's love affair, since he married her. Mr. Enderby could hardly understand it. He was sad, lonely, angry; and his anger, not perhaps unnaturally, vented itself in implacable hostility towards the son, whose action, he persuaded himself, was, if indirectly, still certainly connected with his wife's long illness and death.

BOOK SECOND.
A TEST OF FRIENDSHIP.

CHAPTER I.

THE THREADS BEGIN TO CROSS.

COMPARED with many of its sister towns situated along the shores of the Gulf of Genoa, Terzia cannot claim to be a very pretty place. It is too full of the whirl of machinery, the clank and clang of hammers, and the dust of workshops to be altogether pleasant. The beautiful old ship-building trade, formerly the wealth of this part of the coast, is fast dying out; but a few half-finished wooden vessels, with an olive branch at the prow, stand on the stocks in the large half-deserted yards on the grey sea-shore. Iron and steam, strong and unpoetic, have it pretty much all their own way nowadays. The famous Corniche Road, too, is here narrowed to a sort of straggling street between high vineyard walls and tall painted houses; and—whether it appears as a sea of pale mud, or is smothered in paler and at least equally objectionable dust—is always, wet or dry, a perfect pandemonium of rough two-wheeled waggons, loaded with heavy cotton bales, sacks of rags, or with great barrels piled up to an alarming height, and of straining mules and horses, and yelling drivers, and grating tramcars.

Yet if you leave the busy little town, with its

teeming streets, and wander up the steep paved lanes behind between the vineyards, and if, when you have passed the last of the red and yellow walls, and step out into the open olive grounds above, you stop and turn, and look back, the scene is very moving and inspiring even here. For you are in Italy, after all—beautiful, passionate, terrible Italy.

About a quarter of a mile out of Terzia, going eastward towards Genoa, you come to some rusty iron gates in the high, red-plastered wall that skirts the road on the left. A broad carriage-way leads from these gates first across flat market-gardens, in which the peasants work, with sleeves and trousers stripped up, showing bare, muscular brown arms and legs; then, turning sharply to the left, it runs at the foot of a natural cliff of buff-coloured rock, supported here and there by masonry. After thirty yards or so the road turns to the right and climbs the hill, shaded on the south by a line of dwarfed and distorted fir trees, and with broad spaces of grass on each side of it, bright in the spring-time with flame-coloured gladiolas, red orchis, and blue-feather hyacinth. Another zigzag, through vineyard terraces and broken rocks, among which the fig trees root themselves, and straggle a maze of smooth grey branches, grey roots and glossy dark-green leaves, and then at last you reach the final bit of the ascent—a broad carriage-way still, gravelled with little black and white pebbles from the neighbouring beach, a wall of brick and rock on the left hand, and on the right a drop into the vineyard below. On either hand the road is bordered with hedges of pink monthly roses, wherein the cicadas, with their great eyes and foolish faces, sit fiddling all day long

in the hot sunshine. The carriage-drive ends at last in a wide gravelled terrace in front of a small orange-red stuccoed villa.

Standing on this high terrace, where the noises of the road, the railway, and the town—the ring of hammers, crack of whips, and wild cry of the muleteers—reach you, softened and harmonized by distance, the scene is a very noble one.

In the south the purple sea rises and meets the sky-line. The grey sweep of the narrow beach trends away in a bold curve, here bordered by gleaming houses, and there broken by some dark densely wooded promontory, past cape after cape, and headland after headland to the westward. Just below lies the town, built in massive blocks of tall many-windowed houses, which have flat or low-pitched roofs, and are painted every conceivable colour, from the lightest green or yellow to the deepest blue or chocolate. At the back of the town, and rising tier above tier up the sloping foot-hills, are vineyards and gardens, with now and again some gaily coloured villa, or the tall campanile of a village church. Here and there long lines of cypresses follow each other in a dark and mystic procession down the hillside, marking the boundary of a landowner's property. Above, the olive-grounds stretch in a misty silver belt around the slopes. Above them are thickets of great white heath, and sweet bay and myrtle, with the quaint, blotted form of an umbrella pine, disengaging itself sharply in places from the undergrowth. Above, again, are dusky fir-woods, and then at last your eyes rest on the bare arid mountain sides towering up in the searching sunlight, the summits crowned by a pilgrimage church or monastery,

or rising naked, unadorned, and harsh against the sky.

The Apennines behind Terzia may be described as a giant hand pointing seaward, with deep ravines and watercourses between the gigantic outstretched fingers. Only the town and beach and road are pale; all the rest—woods, mountains, rich purple sea, and rich purple sky—glow and palpitate with intensity of colour; while in the extreme west, above the deep blue of far-off hills and capes, soaring up into the clear ether, rise the glittering peaks and dazzling snow-wastes of the Maritime Alps.

Towards the latter end of April, 1877, about six months after old Matthew Enderby's death, one burning afternoon, the subject for a delightful little picture might have been found on the terrace up at the Villa Mortelli.

A low broad parapet of stone, stuccoed and painted the same orange-red as the house, guards the terrace in front. Looking down over it there is a sheer drop of some five-and-twenty, or perhaps thirty feet, into the vineyard below. At this time the leaves were just breaking, and a delicate veil of green spread itself over the face of the vineyards.

In the corner of the terrace, away from the carriage-drive, with her back against a trellised and somewhat dilapidated arbour, smothered in Wistaria and climbing roses, sat a young girl. She rested one elbow on the low wall by her side, and held in the other hand a great red umbrella;—not one of those mean little scarlet parasols that ladies affected so much some few years ago, but a real, honest, peasant's umbrella, big enough to shelter a whole family from sun or rain,

and decorated round the edge of it with a barbaric pattern, woven in staring black and white and yellow.

The young lady was very simply dressed in a plain light cotton gown, which had, however, an admirable air of freshness and crispness in every fold and frill of it. Her figure was slight but delicately rounded, and her face was charming; not strictly beautiful, perhaps, for there were delightful little touches of individuality about it which prevented its belonging to any stereotyped and obvious order of female loveliness. It was just that—an entirely charming face, bright, out-looking, and with a sort of morning clearness upon it, and an effect of guilelessness which made one disposed to treat this young lady more as an attractive child than as a person who had already reached the tiresome period of life technically described as—years of discretion.

Her hair—fair, with golden lights and ruddy shadows in it—was gathered up high at the back, showing the shape of her head, and curled prettily upon her forehead. Her complexion was fair, too, with a clear healthy tinge of red in her cheeks; the nose, a little uncertain in line, but daintily cut about the tip and small curved nostrils; the mouth round and sweet, though wanting in those generous curves about the lips which make some mouths so nobly beautiful. Her eyes, a clear blue-grey, were set perhaps just a trifle too near together; still, they were finely shaped, and opened well. There was nothing too positive, too definite in the girl's face. Her long eyelashes and arched eyebrows were but a few shades darker than her bright hair.

Altogether she was charming; and charming, too,

with that peculiar indescribable charm that belongs to certain women—a magnetic quality not dependent on faultlessness of physical beauty for its existence, but a something beguiling and upsetting, especially to the masculine sense, which seems to emanate from the whole person.

Certain women have a singular power of establishing a relation—I do not know how else to put it—with almost every man they come across. How it is done I cannot pretend to say; for one may be very sensible of an effect, and remain entirely unable to analyze the cause of it. Only I fancy that every woman whose name has come down to us through the long centuries with a glamour of magic about it, so that the very sound of it makes the blood pulse more quickly, must, in some degree, have possessed that strange power. Helen must have had it, or Troy town would never have suffered long sorrow and fire and final desolation. All those gracious and noble ladies must have had it whose remembrance is enshrined for ever in the "*Ballade des Dames du temps jadis*," of François Villon, thief, profligate, and writer of imperishable verse. Catherine of Siena must have had it, or never, surely, would popes and priests and princes have listened so humbly to her chiding. Julie d'Étange—most moving, if most imprudent of fictitious heroines—must have had it, or M. de Wolmar would never have married her, any more than Saint-Preux would have broken his heart for her among the rocks above the blue lake at Meillerie. These, and many more: for the list would be a long one of potent and perilous names. Yes, we had better forget them, we sensible middle-aged people, and let them fade away into

the great unknown along with "the snows of yester year."

In saying all this I do not, for a moment, desire to imply that there was anything very wonderful, extraordinary, or epoch-making about the girl sitting in the Italian sunshine, on the terrace up at the little red villa; nor do I, for a moment, purpose to compare her with those queens of fiction, life, and legend whose memory comes over us with so dangerous a strength.

The indefinable charm I have spoken of greets you in many and very different places. It belongs exclusively to no one age, or class, or nation; it may be found both in saint and sinner. It may look out at you alike from the face of a labourer's daughter, bending over a steaming and prosaic wash-tub, and from that of a child in the perky, progressive class-room of a modern board-school, and from that of some well-bred and well-known woman moving in the sacred, innermost circle of London or Parisian society. Still it is not very common—perhaps fortunately—all the same. The plain, steady, common-sense work of the world would hardly keep on quite so regularly if it was very common. And it is only fair to add, too, that hundreds and thousands of women have been honoured highly and loved devotedly who possessed no trace of it. It is a peculiar gift to chosen individuals; it comes to them by nature, and was never learnt, nor taught of any yet. Only, wherever you meet with it, the colour grows richer and the pace faster, and Love laughs aloud with the hope of another victim; and life either spreads out before you strangely fair, and deep, and full, or is stained for ever after with the memory of a great regret.

On the low red wall, just beyond the shadow cast by the big umbrella, sitting hunched together basking in the sunshine, was a good-sized brown monkey; a grotesque and sorrowful little figure, curiously in contrast with that of the young girl.

Centuries of disappointment and fruitless endeavour seemed to have wrinkled the loose skin on his forehead. Occasionally he reached round and scratched his back with one thin, brown hand, or made a fierce, rapid grab at the small green lizards that ran glittering up and along the sunny wall. If the girl moved, ever so slightly, he looked round sharply at her, with that quick uplifting of the eyebrows and gleam of the sad shrewd eyes, which go to make a monkey's face so unspeakably restless and painful.

The cicadas shrilled in the rose-bushes, while the green frogs, at the old tank away along the vineyard path to the left, kept up the chorus immortalized by Aristophanes. The jangle of bells came down from one of the village churches on the hillside above, and the grate of wheels and cry of the muleteers came up from the crowded road below. Little playful winds swept across from the deep mountain valleys, scattered a few loose petals of the roses on the trellised arbour, and then wandered away out to sea. And the charming girl sat dreaming, looking lazily out over the brilliant scene from under the rosy shade of her red umbrella, while the brown monkey beside her basked in the broad sunshine, musing, perhaps, in perplexity of spirit, on the many griefs and wrongs of his strange half-human race.

There seemed a pause, a space of sweet sunny waiting, up at the Villa Mortelli that afternoon. The

lights were lit, and the curtain was up, and the stage was set and ready. When would the rest of the actors come on?

About five o'clock the young lady's lazy reverie was brought to a close by the rattling of a carriage up the steep road between the rose-hedges, and the grinding of the loose gravel under its wheels as it drew up at the front door.

She had watched the carriage ever since it turned in at the iron gates off the high road—had stretched herself a little, and sat up with a growing expression of interest and vivacity in her pretty face.

"Malvolio," she said, leaning towards the monkey as she spoke, "I perceive that there has been a slight mistake. Your poor master is grilling himself quite needlessly at Terzia railway station all this while. His temper will be execrable when he returns. He will not be able to forgive himself for having been coerced into committing a civility. Prepare yourself, my dearest little beast," she added, "there will shortly be remarkable developments in the situation."

The monkey gazed at her anxiously, as though trying hard to understand. He scratched his ugly little head, wrinkled up his forehead, and grinned rather wickedly. The girl watched him attentively for a moment or two, and then laughed gaily and softly, as a child does with a delicious anticipation of coming amusement.

"Anything is delightful in the way of a change, isn't it, my excellent Malvolio?" she said to the monkey.

Colonel Enderby was a long-suffering man. As a rule he could put up resignedly with a large amount

of discomfort. But he had come to visit Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay, at the Villa Mortelli, out of the purest sense of duty. She was the widow of an old friend, and the Colonel had a high respect for the claims of friendship, even in the second degree. Still, it must be allowed that where duty is the sole motive power, small annoyances are liable to take a very strong hold upon the imagination; and as he got out of the carriage, Colonel Enderby certainly felt far from urbane. He was choked with dust and roasted with the blazing afternoon sun. He had left his travelling companion seated over the remnants of an excellent luncheon in the shaded hall of a Genoese *café*. The thought of Edmund Drake smoking peacefully in that cool and stately place had been distinctly irritating. He could have found it in his heart to use some rather forcible expressions concerning these few miles of road out from Genoa. He was prepared to state on oath, if necessary, that they were simply the most hot, arid, ugly, and generally insufferable miles of road in the known world.

The untidy plausible Italian coachman rang the bell, and then banged casually on the door with the handle of his whip, to hurry the servants within; but no sound was audible indoors. Bells, apparently, were answered with truly artistic deliberation at the little red villa.

Colonel Enderby stamped his feet to settle his trousers down over his boots, and beat himself a little with his gloves to get some of the pale dust off his coat, looking rather gloomy and injured all the while. It was extremely unpleasant to him to be otherwise than absolutely neat and clean. He glanced critically

at the pair of small, weedy carriage horses, who stood with heads hanging wearily down and streaming flanks. Then he turned impatiently to the door again.

"Nuisance it is, waiting!" he said. "I suppose this is the right house? Why on earth don't they answer the bell?"

Looking up as he spoke, he became aware, for the first time, of the presence of the young lady, who stood watching him from the other side of the terrace. He was conscious of a slight shock of surprise, and of a sincere hope that she might not have overheard his hasty observation. He lifted his hat, and keeping it in his hand, passed round in front of the horses' heads and walked across the terrace towards her.

The girl, too, came a few steps forward. Her light cotton gown showed a rosy red in the shade of her big umbrella. Her eyes were very bright, and she was smiling. It was a smile not easily forgotten—brilliant, irresistible, delicious to look at, and liable to retain a prominent place subsequently in the mental vision.

As she came forward the monkey scrambled down off the wall and followed her, seizing the folds of her dress with his long narrow hands for support. He chattered angrily at the carriage and the approaching stranger—his queer wizened countenance distorted with emotion. Meanwhile the good-looking Italian driver, leaning lazily against the nearest of his smoking horses, laughed and made grimaces at the poor little creature, exciting him to a painful pitch of impotent fury.

"Colonel Enderby," said the girl, looking up at him, and still smiling, "I am afraid you have alto-

gether forgotten me. I am so sorry. Indeed, it amounts to being a little humiliating for me, for I have the most perfect recollection of you. You were always so kind to me."

Philip Enderby felt slightly embarrassed. He was not accustomed to be greeted after this fashion by unusually pretty young ladies. Since the far-off days of Cecilia Murray, his experience in the matter of women's society had neither been very large nor very intimate. He had an almost quixotic reverence for the sex—such a reverence as cynical persons are wont to say can only be maintained at the expense of the presence of accurate knowledge.

There was a frankness in the young lady's expression, and a graceful self-possession in her manner, however, which the Colonel found reassuring. He answered her slowly, perhaps a trifle stiffly; yet he could not help smiling too, her face in its expression had such a bewitching fearlessness.

"I ought to know you, though nine years have made a good deal of difference, it must be owned. You are Miss Pierce-Dawnay."

The girl laughed softly, and put up her eyebrows with a little air of protestation and regret.

"Oh yes," she said; "nine years make a lamentable difference, of course. They change simple Jessie into elaborate Miss Pierce-Dawnay, and they put dolls and bonbons out of the question. That last is especially trying for me. I am just as fond of bonbons as ever. Your taste in dolls was not—well, how shall I say it?—exactly professional, Colonel Enderby, but in bonbons I found it ravishing."

There was a carefulness and distinctness in Miss

Pierce-Dawnay's pronunciation which one frequently remarks in English persons who are constantly in the habit of speaking a foreign language. Her words did not run into each other in the slipshod fashion too common even among our wellbred and highly educated countrywomen. They seemed to stand apart, and each maintain a full and separate value. This little mannerism has something both pretty and arresting to the attention in it.

Philip, quiet, serious, middle-aged man as he was, felt delicately amused and interested in the charming young creature before him. It is very strangely pleasant, as one gets on in years and the glory of the day grows pale, to meet with something as fresh and gay and fearless as this girl. To the Colonel there was a touch of pathos in her radiant youthfulness. She struck him as a charming child even now, and he answered her little speech with a certain smiling gravity.

"We might manage the bonbons still, I dare say, if you wish it."

"Oh," she cried, "thank you! I have yet, then, something to live for, and you are doubly welcome. To tell the truth, we have been slightly wanting in amiability and animation lately here at the Villa Mortelli. Your arrival is every way agreeable; we have wanted something to change the current of our thoughts."

Colonel Enderby bowed his recognition of this civil observation.

"But mamma will be impatient to see you," the young lady continued. "And, meanwhile, will you kindly discharge that intolerable driver, who is nearly

sending our poor Malvolio into fits by jeering at him? Then we will come indoors, please. Ah! there is Parker. She will tell you what to pay that wretched driver. They always overcharge; it is their recognized system. Parker is the only member of this establishment who can manage them."

The person indicated, a tall, angular, hard-featured woman, stood in the doorway, delivering herself of a series of short observations in curiously bad Italian.

"Antonio is to take Colonel Enderby's things down to his hotel later, Miss Jessie," she said, looking sharply at Philip, and addressing his companion. "Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay is waiting for you in the drawing-room. Marie's taken in tea."

The Colonel, assisted, whether he would or no, by Parker—who indulged in biting comments on the shiftiness of Italians in general, and Genoese cab-drivers in particular—finally succeeded in satisfying the demands of the coachman. Then the long whip cracked, and the tired little horses jerked up their heads, and the carriage rattled away down the steep road between the pink rose-hedges in the southern sunshine.

"Shall we come indoors now?" asked Jessie.

She closed her umbrella, and, picking up Malvolio in her arms, turned towards the house. As she did so, Colonel Enderby was sensible of a quick movement of repulsion, almost of disgust.

"Surely you are not going to carry that monkey," he said hastily. "Here, let me take it."

"Oh no, he would perhaps bite you," she replied; "and that would be such an unfortunate beginning to your visit. He is very spiteful with strangers. But I

often carry him when his master, my cousin, Bertie Ames, is not at hand—don't I, Malvolio?"

Colonel Enderby could offer no further objection, yet somehow he did not at all like it. Perhaps it was the result of a long night journey through from Paris; perhaps he had got sunstroke standing talking on the terrace without his hat; but he was undoubtedly aware of a strange and decidedly disagreeable sensation as he passed from the glow and splendour of colour and sunshine outside into the dim chill entrance-hall of the Villa Mortelli. It seemed to him as if somewhere else, long, long ago, all this had happened before. He knew it was a foolish, absurd fancy, and it annoyed him. Yet surely it was not the first time he had followed the graceful flitting figure of this young girl up the cold, white, marble staircase, while the weird face of the still chattering and but half-pacified monkey grinned back at him over her shoulder.

CHAPTER II.

BEAUMONT PIERCE-DAWNAY'S WIDOW.

THE Villa Mortelli is a plain house. It has seen its best days, and everything about it has grown a little tumble-down and antiquated. The present owner is only too happy to let the upper suites of rooms to any family, Italian or foreign, with a taste for quiet and economy, which can be induced to rent them; while the surroundings of the house are left pretty much to their own devices, subject to a periodic tidy-

ing up on the part of the peasant overseer, who looks after the vineyards and market-gardens below.

It is a decidedly plain house. The groundfloor on either side the front door has but a couple of heavily grated windows in it, and is given over to kitchens and chilly flagged store-rooms opening into a central hall. Above is a low *entresol*, with ugly little square windows overlooking the terrace; and above, again, are two floors of large and rather handsome rooms. The lower of these two suites opens at the western end on to the flat roof of a building originally, no doubt, designed for a coach-house and covered yard. The roof is supported on an arcade of arches and massive square pillars, and covers quite a considerable area of ground. The house, with the said building or *loggia*, is painted, as has already been stated, a deep orange red. The windows have outside wooden shutters to them, originally a vivid blue in colour, but now weathered by the action of the rain and sun and sea-wind to a dull neutral tint.

Beyond the house, on the same level as the terrace, and divided from it by a dilapidated wooden paling, is a square flower-garden; a neglected wilderness of a place, a mere tangle of roses, camellias, lilacs, and other flowering shrubs, with lilies and hyacinths below them, straggling about the ill-kept beds as they please. Some lemon trees are trained against the back wall facing the southern sun; and in the centre of the garden, where the four weedy gravel paths meet, stands a clump of not over-productive orange trees. On the low red boundary wall are large earthenware pots of fantastic shapes containing plants of tall sword-leaved aloes.

Immediately behind the house rises a cliff, up which a light iron staircase leads from the back of the *loggia* to the vineyard above. Higher is a slope of coarse grass, the rising ground being crowned with a thick little wood of scrub oak, ilex, and fir.

Jessie, with the monkey in her arms, went quickly upstairs, and, crossing the landing, threw open the tall narrow doors of the drawing-room.

"Mamma," she said, in her clear detached tones, "here is Colonel Enderby. He has driven out all the way from Genoa."

The inside of the little red villa is in harmony with the exterior. It, too, has seen its best days. The room into which the Colonel found himself ushered by his charming guide was long and high, with a vaulted and richly painted ceiling. The two southern windows were shaded with half-closed shutters and red blinds; while the one at the far end of the apartment, draped like the others with faded yellow brocade curtains, stood wide open on to the flat roof beyond. The sun slanting in through it filled the air with warm mellow light. There was an effect of worn-out splendour about the room. The covers of the large couches and chairs showed frayed and threadbare at the points of greatest contact; the plentiful gilding of consol-tables and mirror-frames was a good deal tarnished: but the glorious sunshine streaming in enriched and harmonized it all. Even the marble floor, but sparsely covered with rugs, looked only agreeably cool in the glowing atmosphere.

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay, with both hands outstretched, and a considerable rustling of full black silk and

grenadine skirts, came rapidly across the room to greet her guest.

"Ah, my dear friend!" she exclaimed, "this is indeed a pleasure. How very good it is of you to come to me."

Colonel Enderby bowed over the handsome woman's hands as he held them.

"You are too kind," he answered gallantly. "I engaged long ago always to obey your summons."

"I know—I know you promised. But it is a long time ago. It is so long, too, since we have met at all that I really scrupled to trouble you—the more so, perhaps, because you have been very helpful to me in the past. People say I am exacting; that I demand too much. Those are odious accusations, you know. They make one nervous of asking a service from even one's best friends, at times."

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay put up one hand, and pushed back, rather impatiently, the folds of the black lace mantilla which was fastened across her dusky hair, and hung down softly about her shoulders.

"I have been in great perplexity," she said. "Your visit is most welcome."

She spoke rapidly, and there was a ring of sincerity, almost of enthusiasm, in her reception of him, in which a vainer man than Philip Enderby might have found occasion for a pleasant sense of elation. Luckily, however, he was not given to ebullitions of personal vanity. He supposed the lady's pecuniary affairs were in disorder—it had happened more than once before now—and that she wanted him to set them straight for her. He possessed a very romantic reverence for womankind in the mass; but, all the

same, he was satisfied to take up an extremely practical position with regard to this lady. He had no sentimental hankerings after relations of an intimate or emotional character.

And yet Eleanor Pierce-Dawnay, at two-and-thirty, with her well-set head, pure oval face, and luminous brown eyes, greeting her guest so charmingly in the pale, faded room at the Villa Mortelli, was unquestionably a woman whom you might easily have been excused for desiring to improve your acquaintance with. She was tall, with a fine, supple figure, and stately carriage. Her black hair had none of that greasy gloss on it which too often makes black hair anything but a beauty. Her complexion was dull, it is true; but her skin was even in tone and delicate in texture. She looked like a woman who loved an indoor life, and warm, fragrant atmosphere. There was a richness of suggestion, so to speak, and an intensity about her such as usually go with mental and social rather than with physical activity. The Colonel was aware that his hostess's course had been a slightly original and erratic one; otherwise, listening to her fluent speech and noting her rather stormy beauty, he might very well have wondered a little why this striking-looking young woman had elected to shut herself up, with her step-daughter, in the solitude of a quiet country house.

"You are not the least altered," she went on, moving back a step or two, and looking at her guest carefully.

"I wonder whether that is good news or not," answered Philip, smiling. He was a trifle put about by this attentive scrutiny.

"Undoubtedly it is good news."

Eleanor laid her hand lightly on Colonel Enderby's arm.

"You have come, and I am very grateful. There is the whole matter. Now let us have some tea. You must be tired after your long journey. Come and sit down comfortably."

"I am so disgustingly dirty," remarked the Colonel, as he followed his hostess up the long room. He had been wishing to make this apology from the moment he came in. "I am really ashamed of appearing before you in this state."

Eleanor stopped a moment, and turned to him.

"The same little mania as of old about dust, Colonel Enderby," she said. "Ah! that reminds me of so much."

During the foregoing conversation the girl had been standing aside, watching her two companions with a gay little air of interest and amusement. Now she moved away, and stepped out on to the loggia.

"Mamma is going to have reminiscences," she murmured. "We will retire, Malvolio, and return at a more convenient season."

"Dear child," called Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay after her; "remember the sun. Have you got a hat?"

"The awning is up," answered the girl, looking back and smiling brightly—less, perhaps, at her step-mother than at Philip—"and the sun never affects me. I am going to watch for poor Bertie."

"We thought you would come straight to Terzia by train," Eleanor said to him. "I did not like your arriving there and finding no one to receive you. I deputed my cousin, Mr. Ames, to go and meet you."

She sat down by the tea-table, and began rearranging the cups and saucers. A silence fell on her, and for a few moments she appeared to be somewhat oblivious of the presence of her guest.

Philip sat down in the nearest chair, crossed his legs, and slowly pulled first one side and then the other of his thick moustache with the thumb and forefinger of his left hand in a meditative fashion. Several things in the course of the last hour had surprised him a little. He did not feel quite at home with his new circumstances.

As Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay handed him his teacup, she looked up with a sudden change of expression.

"What do you think of my step-daughter?" she asked.

The question was so wholly unexpected that Colonel Enderby paused for a moment before answering it. During that brief pause he was acutely sensible of the clear tones of the girl's voice—talking half-mockingly to the monkey—which came in, along with the sunshine, at the open window.

"I think that your step-daughter has grown into a very beautiful person," he said at last, with a certain seriousness.

"Ah, you too!" cried his hostess.

Perhaps there was the faintest savour of irritation in her manner. Any way, she did not enlarge upon the subject. She talked on, pleasantly enough, about less personal matters—friends in England, the Colonel's journey and so forth, for some minutes, then asked one or two questions about Matthew Enderby's last illness, about Bassett Darcy and the disposition of the property.

"It seems to me you have been very badly used,

Colonel Enderby," she said at last. "And I suppose, with your usual generosity, you submitted to be despoiled without a single protest."

The Colonel smiled. He was not accustomed to the overflowings of feminine sympathy, or the picturesqueness of feminine statement. They struck him both as amusing and violent.

"That is rather a hard way of putting it, you know," he answered.

He did not particularly enjoy discussing his own affairs with Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay—or any one else, for that matter.

"My father had a perfect right to leave his property as he liked. He knew that I was provided for under my poor mother's will."

"But then there is a recognized custom in these things. You must have always expected to possess the place eventually. You must have looked forward to it—dreamed about it, taken it for granted. No, it seems to me a wretched injustice."

"Hardly as bad as that," said the Colonel. He wanted to take the matter as lightly as possible. "I've wandered about the world too much to be fit to settle down, at my age, into a regular country squire—at least that is what my father thought, no doubt—and quite reasonably too. Of course, being so much out of England, I have lost touch of a whole lot of things—it was inevitable. Now, my brother has been on the spot all the time; he knows all about the place, and so is much more fitted for that sort of life than I am. He's a capital fellow," added Colonel Enderby, heartily. "He's a first-rate farmer and sportsman, and a useful man, too, in the county. He's got a lot of

common sense. Then he's married, you know, and has a family, and that, of course, makes a difference."

"I really can't see that it makes the smallest difference." Eleanor looked up at him very prettily. "A man at your age—specially, perhaps, in your profession—is in the prime of life. You haven't taken a vow of celibacy, I suppose? You may marry too."

Colonel Enderby shook his head. He looked at his boots, he smiled, but with no exuberant cheerfulness.

"No, no, I shall never marry, my dear madam," he answered quietly.

At this moment Jessie came in at the open window.

"Bertie has arrived," she said. "He has driven back. He will certainly be very cross."

"I am sorry," remarked Philip, getting up and setting down his teacup, "that I should have given Mr. Ames all this unnecessary trouble."

Jessie turned to him with the most dainty and reconciling air of amusement. Certainly she was admirably pretty.

"Don't be sorry. It does not in the least signify. Bertie is rather grateful in his heart of hearts to any one who will supply him with a legitimate excuse for ill-temper. He enjoys being"—the girl made a graceful little outward gesture with her two hands—"like that, you know, slightly ill-used and injured."

"Jessie, you are malicious." Eleanor spoke sharply, and her face darkened.

The young lady rested her hand for a moment caressingly on her step-mother's shoulder.

"What could I say, little mamma?" she asked. "It was a choice between Colonel Enderby's peace of mind and poor Bertie's reputation."

There was a sound of footsteps on the stairs. The monkey gave an odd, sharp cry, and ran quickly in at the open window and across the room. It looked even more grotesque and uncanny, perhaps, when it subsided into a mere animal, and went honestly on all fours, than when it stood or sat upright with an assumption of discreet and human attitudes. As the door opened, the monkey sprang nimbly off the floor into the arms of the young man who entered, making as it did so strange caressing noises.

"Poor little abomination!" said Mr. Ames, as he stroked and fondled the creature.

He came on slowly into the room, looking rather hard at Colonel Enderby meantime.

"Ah! you have arrived, then," he continued. "I have had the misfortune of missing you."

Somehow Philip did not relish being taken so entirely for granted. He would have preferred a more formal and regular mode of introduction.

"I am afraid," he said stiffly, "that I have given you a lot of unnecessary trouble."

"No, no," answered the other man. "Pray don't mention it. It didn't matter. It passed the time, you know; and that, after all, is as much as the most interesting occupation can do for one really."

Mr. Ames, judging by his appearance, was in age something over thirty. He was a good-looking young gentleman, with a dark, pale, and rather sleepy face, short pointed black beard and moustache, and black eyebrows—nearly meeting above the nose and running up a little at the ends. He was dressed with elaborate precision, in the latest English fashion; but an indescribable touch of floridness in the cut of his gar-

ments made the Colonel pretty sure an Italian tailor must be, after all, responsible for the production of them. In his button-hole Mr. Ames wore an extremely fine white gardenia.

"Give me some tea instantly, dear cousin Nell," he said, subsiding languidly into a large arm-chair and addressing Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay. "I conclude you drove out from Genoa?" he added, looking towards Colonel Enderby.

It was observable that his voice was singularly full and sweet, while his dark eyes were nearly as mournful as those of the monkey on his knee.

The Colonel admitted, briefly, that he had driven out from Genoa.

"It is a beastly road," said Mr. Ames, very gently. "Three lumps of sugar, dear Eleanor, please; you always forget my number. And a lump for Malvolio too, please. There, there, quietly, my poor lamb! Let us avoid unnecessary violence," he went on, as the monkey snatched, chattering, at the piece of sugar she held out to it.

Philip did not stay very late at the Villa Mortelli that evening. He parted from his hostess on the terrace. Antonio, the Italian cook,—in a white linen jacket, blue trousers and very ornate smoking-cap, with a large pair of gold-rimmed spectacles, a ferocious grey moustache, and the air of a distinguished field-marshal at least,—stood in the doorway, holding the Colonel's travelling-bag and bundle of wraps, and waiting to show him the way down to the hotel at Terzia.

The sky, in which the stars and crescent moon shone with a cold steady radiance, stretched a vast

dome of purple black over land and sea. The waves lisped and murmured on the beach far below. The croaking of innumerable frogs came from the reservoir away among the vineyards. Wafts of warm air, laden with rich faint scent of orange and lemon blossom, swept round the house from the tangled garden beyond. Up at one of the villages on the mountain side there was a *festa*, and every house was illuminated with rows of candles along each window-ledge, gleaming and twinkling, faint and yellow, through the clear air. The foreground of terrace and vineyards and roadway lay frosted with moonlight and blotted with black shadow.

"Good-night, my dear friend," said Eleanor Pierce-Dawnay.

She held the Colonel's hand in both hers, and looked at him with a strangely restless appealing expression in her fine eyes.

"I don't know how to thank you enough for coming to me. I shall expect you early to-morrow. I have so much to talk over with you. To-night I would not trouble you, but I need your help."

Eleanor checked herself abruptly. Bertie Ames sauntered out from the house and stood beside her.

"Cousin Nell," he said, in his rich, soft voice, "you and Jessie will catch all the colds in the world out here without any shawls. The night is romantic, no doubt, but, unfortunately, it is also chilly."

The girl treated Colonel Enderby to one of her brilliant smiles as she bade him good-bye.

"*Au revoir*," she said. "And the bonbons—shall I really have them?"

Looking back when he had gone halfway down

the carriage road to the iron gates, Colonel Enderby could still see Mr. Ames and Jessie. They stood together, side by side, on the terrace, in the pale moonlight, a black figure and a white one. Suddenly the young girl's laugh rang out clear and sweet through the silence.

"Ah! truly our signorina is an angel," said Antonio, devoutly. "It will be a sad day for the red villa when madame marries her daughter."

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH THE COLONEL TAKES STOCK OF HIS POSITION.

It appeared to Mr. Edmund Drake, who had followed his friend out from Genoa, that he waited a very long while for Colonel Enderby in the smoking-room of the Grand Hotel at Terzia that evening. The good gentleman's mind was not, it must be conceded, of the order which feeds willingly and profitably on itself. Solitude and meditation had never struck him as salutary, or in any degree inspiring. There was, indeed, nothing hermit-like about Mr. Drake's appearance; but rather a certain light and roving quality, which made him suggestive of an elderly, but still able-bodied, butterfly. With praiseworthy diligence he was wont to flutter from amusement to amusement, killing time pertinaciously and with admirable gaiety of heart. He was a constant diner-out. He liked balls, garden parties, and festivities generally. He hunted with the Midlandshire hounds from the be-

ginning of November till the end of March; took rooms in one of those knowing little streets off Piccadilly for June and July; found himself among the purple stretches of the Scotch moors, or by the side of some brawling salmon river in August; paid a round of visits in pleasant country houses, with a view to shooting, in September and October; and settled down again for the serious business of the winter in his capital little bachelor establishment at Tullingworth in time for the third meet of the season, which, as everybody knows, is held at Bassett Darcy.

April and May were off-months, so to speak, with Mr. Drake. He was very grateful to any one who would suggest to him an enjoyable method of passing them; and when, this year, his old and valued friend, Philip Enderby, had proposed a run on the Continent, Mr. Drake accepted the idea with alacrity and enthusiasm. He had a pretty little taste in pictures and music of the lighter sort; and, as the home of the arts, he cherished a great kindness for Italy. It seemed to him rather clever and up to the mark to visit that profoundly picturesque country now and again. He liked to be able to say, "When I was in Rome in '57," or, "When I was on my way to Venice in '65." It sounded well, and served to impress some fair neighbour at a provincial dinner-party with the notion that she had the honour of sitting by a travelled and intelligent man of the world, who might be expected to look at life generally from a comprehensive and cosmopolitan standpoint.

And it must be owned that even now, though rotund in the central region of his person, though grey about the moustache and whiskers, though bald—yes,

lamentably bald on the crown of his head, which rose white and shining, above a thick semicircle of grizzled hair—even now Mr. Drake was penetrated with a constant desire to impress and captivate the members of the opposite sex. His vanity in this matter was deliciously *naïf*. He professed a deep and searching knowledge of feminine peculiarities; and being, in point of fact, an eminently modest and well-conducted person, loved to represent himself as a terrible rake, a very Don Juan of a fellow, full of perilous dissimulation, and as inflammable as gun-cotton.

When Colonel Enderby at last entered the smoking-room that evening, Mr. Drake received him with a lively sense of satisfaction. He laid down the meagre pages of *Galignani*, from which he had been vainly trying to extract some small amount of mental sustenance, with an air of evident relief and applied himself vigorously to conversation.

“Not half a bad place this,” he said; “and really they gave us a first-rate dinner. They’re trying to work the hotel into popularity just now, you see, it being quite new, and good feeding pays as an advertisement. There are a very tidy set of people here, too, take ’em all round. A very effective-looking Russian woman just opposite to me at table this evening—I wished I’d been nearer to her. You must observe her to-morrow, Enderby. Upon my word, she’s worth looking at. The everlasting English parson here, of course—little red-haired fellow this time, with a face like a ferret. He’s got his wife, and a couple of sisters-in-law—I take them to be by their looks—with him. Very plain, well-meaning sort of people, you know. The English all seem to me pretty fair.

But there are half a dozen Germans—greedy, noisy, ill-dressed lot, I must say.

He threw himself back on the broad orange-and-black covered divan, fitted against the wall of the room. "Brutes!" he said under his breath, and then fell to humming a gay air from *La fille de Madame Angot*, to restore his imperilled equilibrium.

Colonel Enderby, meanwhile, sat himself down in an angle of the afore-mentioned divan, which, along with a few marble-topped tables and a generous supply of mirrors and spittoons, constituted the entire furniture of the lofty light-coloured room. His sympathies being by no means strongly Gallic, he ignored the subject of his friend's discourse, and applied himself to matters nearer home.

"I'm glad you like the place," he said. "Should you mind staying on here a day longer? It seems that Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay wants to talk over some business matters with me to-morrow. Probably I shan't be of the slightest use to her, but I must listen, at all events. And she insists on our both dining there to-morrow night. You won't mind, Drake, eh?"

"Delighted, I'm sure," replied the other man, cordially. "I'll poke about here in the morning, you know, and just run into Genoa in the afternoon, while you're busy."

Colonel Enderby was not in particularly good spirits. He lighted his cigar, and sat smoking in silence, staring vaguely at the well-laid *parquet* floor between his feet.

Mr. Drake, however, wanted to talk. He fidgeted with *Galignani*, hummed *Madame Angot* with increas-

ing vivacity, and at last, no longer able to contain himself, embarked in an inquiry.

"Well, and how did you find Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay?" he asked. "I only saw her once—years ago. Good-looking woman, and promised to improve."

"I don't know that she has altogether fulfilled that promise," observed the Colonel, drily. "But as far as looks go, she's handsome enough still."

Mr. Drake fidgeted about again for a minute or so.

"Well, and what about the little girl?" he inquired lightly.

"Oh, she's grown up as little girls will."

"Pretty?"

"Very pretty," said Philip, with a certain finality in his tone.

Few things are more vexing to your thorough-paced gossip than to be answered in this poverty-stricken sort of fashion. But Edmund Drake was not easily put off; he returned valiantly to the charge.

"Anybody else there?" he asked, after a time.

Colonel Enderby raised his eyes with a questioning expression.

"There—where?" he said. "Oh! at the Villa Mortelli? Yes, a nice, gentle, little person in grey, who put in an appearance at dinner—*dame de compagnie*, I suppose; and an infernally ugly monkey; and a cousin of Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's—a young man." The Colonel leant back and crossed his legs. "I didn't quite fancy the young man somehow," he added presently.

"Ah! one rarely does fancy the young man, you know, when one's getting well on towards fifty," remarked Mr. Drake, with a chuckle. "Well, I shall

turn in now, I think, Enderby; and I strongly recommend you to do the same. Nothing like a good night's rest for bringing one round after a long journey, you know."

Philip, however, did not take the excellent advice thus offered him. He sat up rather late.

More than once Galli, the head waiter, clothed in funereal black, with a napkin over his arm, and flat, tired, slippered feet, looked in to see if the English Colonel had not at last retired, so that he might put out the gas and go to bed himself. Galli had a noble head and pale, finely chiselled face, set in a frame of crisp black beard and crisp black hair, suggestive of some impassive and world-weary Roman emperor. In point of fact, his soul was more in harmony with his slippered feet than with his imperial head. It was a common, patient, unimportant little soul, quite capable of thrilling into ecstasy over a tip of five francs. The mark of a stupendous history and civilization has stamped itself in royal characters on so many Italian faces, behind which there really is nothing at all, except slightly amiable vacuity. Galli looked in at the smoking-room door, saw Colonel Enderby was still there, and went humbly away again, to meditate in silence and loneliness among his table-cloths, glasses, and decanters.

Philip sat and smoked and thought, or rather ruminated; for when men of the Colonel's type are not actively engaged about some practical matter, they can hardly be said to think. Their mental processes are chiefly pictorial, I fancy; not so much a matter of words and ideas, as of scenes and impressions.

The gas burned with a yellow, unsteady light,

revealing very fully the nakedness of the room. In the corridor just beyond, Mr. Drake's enemies, the lively, not to say uproarious, party of Teutons were playing cards.

His surroundings were far from romantic; and yet the pictures which presented themselves to Philip Enderby's mind were undoubtedly touched with the delightful finger of romance. The events of the afternoon had stimulated his memory to a remarkable degree. He seemed to see poor, good-looking, rackety Beau Pierce-Dawnay once more, as he lay tossing restlessly on his narrow camp bed, through the long hours of semi-tropic nights—half wild with fever and exhaustion, crying tears of impotent misery and weakness, and raving about his young wife and his "darling little Jessie," whom he would never see again. Philip had been with poor Beau when he died, and had promised—with the fervour natural to such a moment—to look after the dying man's wife and child. He had kept his promise, too, with perhaps unusual faithfulness—for that same fervour of the watcher beside the death-bed, cools down sensibly, as a rule, after the funeral: and what was originally embraced as a sacred duty, appears too often, later, as something allied to a bore. But Philip had really applied his mind to helping his friend's widow. He had extracted her jointure from a recalcitrant father-in-law; had advised her successfully regarding her affairs on several occasions—Eleanor had rather a gift for getting into what are vulgarly called tight places—and had held himself ready, at all times, to come to her if she should send for him. For the last few years their relation had been a less intimate one, it is true; yet the Colonel

had never regarded himself as released from his old engagement.

The Germans finished their game. Galli looked in for a moment, tired, but acquiescent in whatever state of things might be revealed to him. But Philip Enderby sat still on the orange-and-black divan, his legs crossed, his steady blue eyes staring at nothing in particular, a queer smile about his lips, and the stump of his cigar fading from crimson heat to grey ash between his fingers.

A fair young face smiled at him from under a great red umbrella, and a light slender figure flitted before him in the gloom of a wide dusky stairway, and merry mocking words wandered in through a sunny window. A hundred dainty little movements and charming glances forced themselves on his remembrance; and all the while, with ancient wizened countenance, a monkey grinned and chattered at him; and a young man—well, no, not a young man exactly, but a decidedly younger man than Colonel Enderby—stood by, mournful, cynical, and it must be owned, most unnecessarily good-looking into the bargain.

The Colonel sat up and shook himself. He did not half like his own imaginations. His state of mind was decidedly abnormal, and it worried him. Then his thoughts wandered back to Cecilia Murray, his old love. Yes, he had been true to her, very true, on the whole,—even when it was quite useless to be so. A certain tenderness came over him even now whenever he thought of her. Ah! how different things might have been if he had married her years ago, and if, in due time, Bassett Darcy had come to him!

Philip had visions of himself, solidly prosperous, settled in life, with a wife who had become a sort of second self to him, and a troop of growing boys and girls around him; hunting three or four times a week; riding over on Board days to Slowby; going to church soberly on Sunday; busy with pleasant homely matters; building good cottages; giving away beef and pudding to the labourers' wives at Christmas; wandering about on nice, dull, dewy mornings, with a spud in his hand, and vexing seriously because there were so many plantains in the turf on the lawns. He sighed. Yes, notwithstanding his assertions made to Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay a few hours before, *that* was the life he was really cut out for—ordinary, sensible, and responsible, touched with kindly humour, and backed with dignified comfort. Renunciation is not such an easy matter, after all. You may fast of your own free will, and not because you are compelled to; but you will feel as hungry for the food you deny yourself as for food that is denied you. Colonel Enderby had forgiven his father, he harboured no grudge against his younger brother; but he was not very cheerful all the same. He got up and took one or two turns up and down the room. Then, moved by a sudden impulse, he stood still in front of one of the mirrors, and took a good, long, honest look at himself.

The impression he received was not an encouraging one, somehow.

"Drake was right," he said, a little inconsequently. "I'm nearly fifty. It's all very well, but there are a number of things you must do before then if you're going to do them at all. I feel as if a little fighting would be rather a comfort just now," he added.

The Colonel moved across to the table again, and picked up his cigar-case and box of fusees.

"I'd better go to bed. I'm out of sorts, I think, to-night. The day after to-morrow we'll go on to Spezia; Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay will have said her say by then, I suppose."

Just outside the door he nearly ran into Galli— yawning, but mild, and still clinging to his napkin. Philip Enderby was struck with sudden compunction; he said a few civil words to the man about having kept him up so late.

Galli bowed and smiled faintly—a wellbred, if discrowned Cæsar.

"We are accustomed," he remarked vaguely. "The German gentlemen have but lately finished. I wait to see to the gas."

And with shuffling footsteps he passed along into the empty smoking-room.

CHAPTER IV.

"LE DESSOUS DES CARTES."

FOR reasons which he would have found it difficult to define, Philip put off his visit to the Villa Mortelli, next day, till the afternoon. He did his best to maintain a very British and unimpressible frame of mind. Accompanied by that lively and self-important little man, Mr. Drake, he explored the not very promising town of Terzia in the morning; looked in at the lofty, stuffy, painted church, and pronounced it tawdry; lingered for a few minutes at the great

straggling station, and remarked, with a grain of contempt, how slovenly and slipshod all Italian railroad arrangements appeared to be; loitered down on the grey beach, in the brilliant sunshine, watching the great blue-green rollers come in in endless succession, and break in hollow thunder and snowy foam at his feet, and declared he had seen a ten-times finer ground sea on the west coast of England. The Colonel was sensible of a strong instinct of self-protection at this juncture. He felt the desirability of cultivating a number of wholesome British prejudices. The feeling amused him, even while he recognized its wisdom.

About half-past two o'clock he arrived at the little red villa. The sky was absolutely clear, and the whole place seemed to sleep in the rich glowing sunshine. The front door open on to the terrace. Philip rang; waited; rang again, and then, getting bored both with the delay and the heat, went indoors and upstairs.

The drawing-room door stood open too. From within came the sound of a piano. Some one was playing brilliantly, almost riotously, a valse. There is an indescribable underlying pathos in dance music—everybody knows it; a heartache behind all the laughter, a weariness below all the rapid movement, a question, a doubt, a misgiving, under all the radiance and joy.

Colonel Enderby did not quite care to acknowledge the penetrating sentiment of the music just then. He knocked at the door, as no servant was visible, and then walked straight into the room. As he did so, the valse sank away into a tender regretful passage.

Jessie Pierce-Dawnay was at the piano. Apparently she was absorbed in her own performance. Her pretty head was thrown back, and her light figure showed up with a very telling distinctness against the shaded corner of the room beyond the instrument. In a low chair by her side Mr. Ames lounged, slowly cutting the pages of a yellow French novel, and whistling the air of the valse softly as he did so. At the sound of Colonel Enderby's footsteps, he looked up.

"Ah!" he said gently.

The young girl looked round too. She got up quickly and came forward, her face irradiated with one of those delightful smiles.

"You are very late," she said. "Did you get tired of us all last night? We expected you to luncheon at half-past twelve; but perhaps you did well in not coming. You would have found Bertie and me alone. Miss Keat has gone into Genoa; Mamma has one of her headaches, and is invisible."

Mr. Ames, meanwhile, rose slowly from his chair.

"I hope they gave you decent rooms," he observed, in his sweet, drawling voice. "I spoke beforehand; I did what I could; I was assured that you would be treated *en prince*. But a hotel-keeper's business is to tell one lies, you know."

"I did very well, thanks," Colonel Enderby answered, rather shortly. Then he turned to Jessie again, and made one or two necessary and civil inquiries respecting her stepmother.

"Ah! mamma's headaches are very distressing," she said. "They are nervous. When they come on, mamma succumbs; she disappears entirely. As for us, we are very sorry, of course, but we have grown ac-

customed to it; we wait till she reappears, and then we proceed as usual. Bertie suffers at times, too," she added; "but he doesn't disappear. He remains, and I have to amuse him."

"In that case Mr. Ames is hardly deserving of much pity," said Philip.

The young lady was really very captivating as she stood there looking with a sort of mischievous innocence from one of her companions to the other.

"I am to be pitied, though, a good deal, sometimes," she answered. "Bertie is not easy to entertain. He becomes tired of everything. He says he has got beyond it. He has a most beautiful voice, Colonel Enderby, but he will never sing now; he says he has got beyond that. The phrase is odious to me."

The girl spoke with some warmth. Mr. Ames went on quietly cutting the pages of his novel.

"My dear little cousin," he said, "your experience of life is as yet, happily for you, very limited. I will preach you a little sermon."

"Oh, pray don't," said Jessie, quickly, putting up her eyebrows. "I have the most lively objection to sermons."

"I know," he answered. "For an English girl your education has been deplorably neglected in that particular. But if you knew more of the world, you would be vividly aware that the chief business of a reasonable being consists in getting beyond things. Ask Colonel Enderby," he added, glancing up suddenly, "if he is not unpleasantly conscious of having got beyond a whole number of things by now."

"Have you?" said Jessie, almost seriously.

The whole spirit of the conversation was distasteful to Philip. He had taken a dislike to Mr. Ames, who struck him as sententious, and at moments even offensive, with his languor, and his drawl, and his over-delicate manner. The question, too, reminded him, with irritating distinctness, of his unsatisfactory colloquy with the looking-glass in the smoking-room the night before. He paused a moment before answering. The girl repeated her question, looking in his face all the while with curious directness.

"Yes," he said, rather sadly; "I'm afraid I have got beyond a good many things too, Miss Pierce-Dawnay."

"Ah! dear me," she sighed; "what a pity!"

Still she stood gazing questioningly at him. The Colonel felt himself singularly moved by that lingering inspection.

Bertie Ames laughed gently.

"I told you so, Jessie," he said. "The law is of universal application. See, it holds equally good in the case of myself and Colonel Enderby—if I may venture, in passing, to associate my obscure name with his illustrious one. Everybody gets beyond everything, to put it vulgarly. I am almost past this last novel of Daudet's. And the day will come, Jessie, when a new gown—even one from Paris—will cease to give you any very active satisfaction."

"No, no, no!" cried the girl, piteously. Her pretty eyes filled with tears, and she moved two or three steps away from him, and nearer to the Colonel.

"Don't say that—don't spoil it all! It isn't true, Bertie," she cried. "Say it isn't true," she went on, turning to Colonel Enderby—coming so close to him

that he perceived quite strongly the scent of a little bunch of grey violets which she wore in the bosom of her dress—"tell me it isn't true; tell me I shall always go on enjoying things. I enjoy them so much now. Don't let Bertie make me miserable."

At this moment Philip stood undoubtedly in need of all those self-protective instincts which he had sought to cultivate earlier in the day. The situation was a slightly dangerous one. For an instant he was tempted to do an exquisitely silly thing. He was tempted to gather this pretty appealing child into his strong arms and swear—an oath, by the way, quite impossible to keep—that neither Mr. Bertie Ames or any one else should ever give her a moment's distress again. Fortunately, however, most people only do a tithe of the foolish things they are tempted to do. Colonel Enderby drew himself up. He even moved a little farther away. His heart may have beat rather quick for the moment, but that he could not prevent. He glanced at Bertie, who leant easily on the top of the piano, and watched him with a suspicion of lurking amusement in the expression of his handsome face.

"My dear young lady," he said quietly, "if people get discontented and miserable, they have generally only themselves to thank for it, in the long run. One need never, except through one's own fault, get beyond enjoying the things which are really worth most in life."

There was a pause after the Colonel had thus made his confession of faith. Then Mr. Ames observed, but so mildly and amiably that it was impossible to be very wrath with him—

"Pardon me, but I wonder whether you really believe that?"

Just at this moment Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay rustled into the room, closely followed by the austere form of Parker, bearing cushions, eau-de-cologne, and various et ceteras.

"Ah, Colonel Enderby," she said, with a certain weariness of manner which was not without its charm, "I have been expecting you. Why didn't you come earlier?"

As she spoke Eleanor looked rather hard at the Colonel, erect, serious—even a trifle savage; at the young girl, with her flushed face and still misty eyes; and, lastly, at Bertie Ames, leaning indolently on the top of the piano. Her expression changed sensibly, and she spoke perhaps with a grain of uncalled-for rapidity and decision.

"Parker, you may take all those things back into the little drawing-room again, please. I am not very well to-day, not equal to much," she continued, addressing Philip; "still, I cannot afford to waste the precious hours of your visit. I should like to have some quiet talk with you, Colonel Enderby. Will you come with me into my sanctum? It is cooler there, and we shall be alone."

Then she placed her hand on her step-daughter's shoulder and said, "You look tired, Jessie. Take a book, and go to your own room and rest."

"And me?" inquired Mr. Ames, gently, "and me, cousin Nell? In your scheme of universal benevolence, am I to be left out in the cold, or will you kindly devise a suitable occupation for me also?"

Eleanor turned to him with a flash in her eyes.

"You can ring for the monkey," she said briefly.

"Ah, just so. The idea is an admirable one. I too am provided for. Thanks. I may ring for the monkey."

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay looked at Philip. "Let us come," she said, as she moved towards the door.

The Colonel followed her across the landing to another room, though inwardly he was just a shade reluctant to do so. He liked plain sailing, a simple straightforward manner of conducting life; and he began to suspect that plain sailing was by no means the custom of this slightly eccentric household. He was becoming conscious that a good deal was going on around him which he could not fathom, and he did not in the least enjoy it.

When Mr. Ames was alone, he subsided into the deep arm-chair again.

"Cousin Nell becomes enigmatical," he said, half aloud.

If Philip Enderby was already on the look-out for cross currents, and sunken rocks, and shifting winds, his talk with his hostess that afternoon was by no means calculated to reassure him. The preparations for it in the way of smelling-bottles and cushions were alone suggestive of embarrassing possibilities, to a man unused to the habits and requirements of womankind. Then, too, an effect of restlessness, of hardly repressed emotion, which was observable in Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's manner, perplexed him. In a way, he was a little afraid of this stormy handsome woman in her present mood. She struck him as likely to make strange propositions, and prove somewhat unmanageable if they

were not complied with. Mentally, he repeated his decision of leaving Terzia on the morrow.

After some desultory conversation as to his plans—where he was going, and what he proposed to see—Eleanor said, with a certain solemnity in her tone—

“Colonel Enderby, you mustn’t suppose I asked you to put yourself out of the way and come here to see me on some merely frivolous pretext. I want you to be so good as to give me your advice in a difficult and delicate matter. There are reasons which seem to give you a claim in this question. You were my husband’s best friend, and so, in this case, I instinctively turn to you. Will you permit me to speak quite freely?”

The Colonel assented courteously enough. What else could he do? Yet he was sensible of growing discomfort. The room was cool, but the shut and darkened windows produced an effect of airlessness. It was sweet, too, with the scent of flowers, and his hostess, with her serious intense face, sitting on the old-fashioned sofa opposite to him, made a sufficiently telling and graceful picture. But Philip refused to be impressed. Perhaps he was suffering a reaction after his moment of keen feeling in the drawing-room just before. He was not in quite a sympathetic attitude of mind, and yet his loyalty to his old brother-in-arms made him wish to be helpful to Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay if he could.

“I have great confidence in your judgment,” she went on. “I cannot trust myself; I can’t be as dispassionate as I want to be. But I can trust you, Colonel Enderby. Think of all I owe you, as it is.”

“Pray don’t say that,” he interrupted. “Your hus-

band was my very dear friend. I have merely tried to pay—very inadequately—a debt I owed to the dead——”

The Colonel paused. His expression was pathetic, modest, charming, as he looked across at her.

Eleanor was a person of quick perceptions. She had a very high respect for her companion. She felt, too, at this moment, that a dividing wall was, so to speak, broken down between them, and that they had moved several steps nearer to each other in intimacy.

“I know, I know,” she returned warmly; “and it gives me more confidence now. I am horribly perplexed. You must advise me. Tell me,” she went on, speaking quickly, “tell me, what shall I do with my step-daughter, with poor Beaumont’s child?”

Philip Enderby was startled.

“Good heavens! Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay, what do you mean?”

“Oh, don’t misunderstand me,” she answered. “I don’t mean anything very extraordinary. Jessie has reached an age when it becomes necessary to think of her future. She is attractive, she has had many admirers.”

“No doubt,” murmured Philip, almost involuntarily.

“Foreign ways are different to English ones, you know. Parents here take a much more active interest in their children’s prospects than is customary at home. They look forward. They consult with some chosen friend; they decide on a course of action, and carry it out.”

The Colonel began to see what was coming.

Under other circumstances the position he was called upon so unexpectedly to occupy might have struck him as an amusing one. But for some reason he was not in the least inclined to look at the question of Jessie's future from a humorous point of view. He was moved to disclaim, quite hotly, any share in providing for the young lady's happiness.

"You must pardon me," he said. "In all business matters I am glad to be of service to you in any way I can; but this question is altogether outside the range of my capacity. I have not any qualifications for the part of adviser regarding your step-daughter's future. Remember, I had not seen her since she was quite a child till yesterday. I know absolutely nothing of her tastes and inclinations; any interference on my part would be simply grotesque."

Philip leant back stiffly in his chair, and looked away.

"I am sorry, but I must refuse to discuss this matter," he continued. "It places me altogether in a false position. Surely some one else—your cousin, Mr. Ames, for instance—is far better qualified to advise you than I am."

Directly the words were out of his mouth, Philip regretted them. It was odious to him to think of that languid disillusioned young man having a hand in the fate of the pretty child who had implored him so passionately "not to let Bertie make her miserable" only half an hour ago. The Colonel felt as if he had been guilty of an act of treachery. He was furious with himself.

His hostess, too, was perhaps a trifle nettled at

his very plain refusal to do what she asked of him; but outwardly she dominated her displeasure.

"I understand your feeling," she said. "I half expected you would object at first, and I respect you for doing so. But we can't let the conversation end like this. I must explain myself a little further. At the risk of annoying you, I shall go on."

Eleanor sat up; she leant her elbow on the arm of the sofa, and fingered the carved woodwork of it rather restlessly as she spoke.

"In mentioning Mr. Ames you have touched the root of all my perplexities. He is my second cousin. He has been living with us, off and on, for the last two years. Bertie's career has not been an altogether fortunate one. He has had a good deal to endure, one way and another. I think," she added, with a ring of genuine feeling in her voice, "that I have been of some little help to poor Bertie. Colonel Enderby, you must bear with me; you must let me tell you about him."

But the Colonel was growing decidedly restive. He was suspicious of these confidences; he began to distrust whither they might lead. He wanted to cut the conversation short, to go away, to go out of doors—to do anything, in short, but sit here listening in this sweet, airless, oppressive atmosphere.

"You are tired, Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay," he said, getting up and standing before her. "Don't you think it would be best to leave the story of Mr. Ames' troubles till to-morrow morning—till you are rested?"

"You would do me a real favour, Colonel Enderby, if you would listen now."

She turned her face to him suddenly; it seemed pale and haggard in the soft light.

"Pray, pray, listen now," she went on, speaking low and hurriedly, clasping her hands, and leaning forward with her eyes fixed on his face. "You are honest and true, and I am horribly lonely; I am in great distress. I can't tell you altogether why; you must take my word partly on trust. Perhaps I shouldn't have spoken so soon, but I am low and nervous to-day. I hate all that pitiless sunshine, and glare, and glitter outside; it distracts me. I am getting worn out, and I can't be cautious, and diplomatic any longer. I have wanted some one to speak to for weeks and months. Of course, all this seems weak, excited, ridiculous, exaggerated to you; but listen to me, Colonel Enderby, not for my sake, but for the sake of my dead husband, who trusted you—for his sake, hear me out."

The Colonel sat down again. It was all very painful, very unpleasant; but it would be nothing short of brutal to leave a woman pleading for a hearing in that desperate way, and Philip was very far from being a brute.

"Thank you," she said eagerly.

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay pressed her handkerchief hard against her lips; she was altogether unstrung. She had a choking sensation in her throat, and, for a few seconds, was on the edge of an outburst of hysterical sobbing; but she mastered herself by an effort of will, which her companion could not help admiring. She set her teeth, gave herself a petulant little shake, and then began speaking again calmly.

"Bertie's mother was an Italian," she said. "His

father was a banker in Milan. I used to be with them a good deal, years ago, before I married. However, that's neither here nor there. Bertie has money and no profession. He fell wildly in love with a young Italian lady of good family—a distant connection of his mother's. Her parents had other views for their daughter, they would not hear of it. Bertie was not good enough for them, I suppose; they made his religion the objection. It has always struck me as, indeed, a case of the irony of fate, that poor dear Bertie, of all people in the world, should suffer in the cause of religion."

Eleanor shifted her position slightly; she avoided looking at Colonel Enderby.

"The young lady married, as her parents desired her; she did not pretend to care a rap for her husband. She was a beautiful, self-willed, emotional creature. I needn't go into particulars; the story is not a pleasant one. Everybody knew what was happening. Bertie Ames sacrificed his youth to this unfortunate *liaison*; it has blighted his whole life. The lady still cares for him—there have been terrible scenes at times—but he no longer cares, I think, for her. Yet, if her husband were to die, he would marry her to-morrow; he believes he is bound in honour to do so. Bertie's sense of honour is very fine."

Eleanor raised her eyes with a movement of pride as she finished speaking. For the life of him, Philip could not help smiling a little.

"Yes, it is," she cried, with energy. "He no longer cares, but he waits. He will not think of any one else. All his Italian friends laud him as a *preux chevalier*, a very model of constancy."

She paused, still looking up, almost defiantly. Colonel Enderby cleared his throat. He had disliked this young gentleman from the first; and that fact, probably, made him somewhat merciless. Personal feelings insinuate themselves so cunningly into our judgments of others, and offer, on broad, general principles, such excellent justifications for their existence.

"That is a mistake on the part of Mr. Ames' friends," he remarked drily.

A dull flush came into Eleanor's cheeks.

"Yes, from your point of view, I dare say it is; yet, remember, Bertie is more of an Italian than an Englishman. The standards in these matters are different here. But for the last few months I have been growing dreadfully anxious. I have noticed, I have feared that—well, that he was very much drawn towards Jessie. He won't marry, he will never marry any woman but the Countess Tolomei. But, Colonel Enderby, think—think if Jessie comes to care for him."

Colonel Enderby stood up all of a piece, as the saying is.

"Send him away," he said, fiercely. "There is just that one thing to do; send him out of the house directly."

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay flung back her hands wildly.

"I can't, I can't!" she cried. "Anything in the world but that."

Philip stared at her for a moment in dumb amazement. She was pale and scared.

Then as the meaning of her strange outburst began to dawn upon him, he turned away, half in pity, half with a sense of repulsion. The situation was painfully complicated.

Eleanor also had risen to her feet. There was a silence. Presently she spoke.

"I have been mad," she said hoarsely. "I have lost my head and betrayed myself. I have put myself to shame before you. Colonel Enderby, if you are a man of honour—and I know you are that—you will believe what I say now, and then go away and blot my insane self-betrayal out of your mind for ever. Bertie Ames does not dream of this; nobody in the world knows it."

There was a fine dignity about the woman at that moment.

Philip bowed silently. Words were obviously out of the question. Eleanor moved aside, and began nervously arranging some cut flowers that stood on a dish on one of the tables.

The Colonel's mind was penetrated with the remembrance of Jessie. Poor child! her prospects, all things considered, seemed to him sufficiently melancholy. Again, he felt a strong movement of pity—of tenderness towards her. It seemed frightful that this pure, innocent, gay young life should be bound up with the dark unfruitful history he had just been listening to. He stood absorbed in thought. If only something could be done to help her!

Eleanor left off fingering the flowers, and moved about the room impatiently. With whatever sentiments of trust and confidence, with whatever vague hope of possible assistance she had begun her interview with Colonel Enderby, at this moment, in her hot shame and wounded pride, she desired most cordially to be rid of him.

"You leave here to-morrow I think you said?" she observed at last, over her shoulder.

Philip was not prepared for the question. It forced him to come to a sudden decision.

"No," he answered slowly; "I think I shall remain here for a few days longer—that is, of course, if you will permit me to do so."

There was a perceptible interval of silence before Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's answer came.

"It will be delightful," she said at last. "Shall we come into the other room? Miss Keat and the others will be there. It seems to me rather oppressive here."

"Thank you, I think I won't stay now," he responded; "I rather want a walk. I'll come back, with my friend Drake, to dinner."

As the two friends were going down to the hotel that night, Mr. Drake suddenly stopped short in the wavering yellow light of one of the few gas-lamps in the quaint, painted main street of Terzia, and looked full at his companion.

"I don't half like leaving you behind, somehow, Enderby," he said. "It's not merely the breaking up of our plans; though, of course, I'm sorry for that: but I take for granted your reasons for staying are good enough, and so I accept them without any fuss."

The good little gentleman moved on again with his quick, self-important walk.

"I don't know what it is, but, hang it all, Enderby, I feel nervous about you."

Philip laughed in a very cheery, reassuring way.

"You have a wonderful imagination, Drake," he said. "Why, what on earth do you take it is going to happen to me?"

"I don't mind the widow," observed the other man, apparently rather inconsequently; "I'd trust her, I think. At bottom she's a good woman—flighty, of course, and all that sort of thing; but I'll back her to be sound enough here"—Mr. Drake thumped himself heavily in the region of the heart—"sound enough here, you know," he repeated. "But that little girl—upon my word, Enderby, somehow I fight uncommonly shy of that deucedly pretty little girl."

The Colonel looked down; he kicked the loose gravel on the walk of the hotel garden—which they were just then crossing—with his foot, and laughed again, but this time with slight annoyance.

"A thousand to one," he said, "you'll never set eyes on Miss Pierce-Dawnay again, so really I don't think that very much matters."

CHAPTER V.

JESSIE SUGGESTS A REMEDY.

HAVING once committed himself to a line of action, it was Colonel Enderby's habit to stand by it, even when it failed, on more mature consideration, to commend itself very highly to his judgment. Inspired partly by his loyalty to Beaumont Pierce-Dawnay's memory, partly by a quick pity for the two women, whose position seemed to him such a critical and painful one, Philip had decided the evening before to stay on at Terzia. He was going to stick to his post; he was going somehow to see them through. And yet, when in the cheerless light of a very wet morning,

he bade farewell to kind, fussy little Mr. Drake, and saw the latter gentleman pack himself and his baggage into the rattling omnibus, which was to convey him into Genoa, Philip became conscious that perhaps he had undertaken a very foolish piece of business. It was all very well to talk of lines of action; but the unfortunate thing was, that he hadn't any line at all. He could not see his way in the least. He turned back into the large brightly painted hotel, which looked particularly frivolous and ephemeral on this gloomy morning, in anything but a sweet temper. He said to himself that "the whole thing was a nuisance, and that he had got himself into an infernally awkward fix:—" and, it must be owned, he said it with a will.

The Colonel's temper was not improved when, on sallying forth, some few hours later, in a mackintosh and heavy boots in defiance of the streaming rain, he met Mr. Ames just turning in at the gates of the hotel garden. Bertie was holding up a large umbrella, picking his way carefully along the sloppy pavement, and looking mildly disgusted, yet resigned. He had on a very light overcoat, and wore the inevitable white gardenia in his button-hole, a trifle brown at the edges of the petals from the wet.

He nodded blandly to Colonel Enderby.

"I suppose you rather like this sort of weather? It seems home-like," he observed, with a sweet wistfulness of expression, which was by no means appeasing to a man in an irritable frame of mind.

Two minutes before Philip had felt no special objection to the rain. The dull sky was really rather a relief after all that gaudy sunlight. But for some occult reason, as Bertie spoke, his opinion went round

to another quarter with all the velocity of a weather-cock on a gusty day.

"It's the most beastly morning I ever saw," he replied, with considerable asperity. "The whole place looks miserable. It seems to me this country can only look decent in a blaze of sunshine."

Mr. Ames smiled faintly.

"Yes, I understand just what you mean."

He took a leisurely survey of the large hotel, built round three sides of a square and coloured pink, with splendid imitations of stone pilasters and florid mouldings painted in pale yellow, and the shadows they were fondly supposed to cast painted in pale green. Then he turned, and gazed down the many-coloured street behind him.

"I understand perfectly what you mean," he repeated. "It looks very like the inside of a theatre by daylight. You thorough-going English people dislike that; it strikes you as artificial. As for us, we others prefer our theatre, daylight or gaslight, to anything else in the world."

"It all appears to me very cheap and flimsy," said Colonel Enderby. "I can't think much of the beauty of a country when it can be spoilt by a few hours' rain."

He glanced critically at the other man's clothes as he spoke. Mr. Ames' dress provoked him. To-day Philip took great exception at his hat. It was too low in the crown, and too curled up at the sides. "Just like a shop-boy out for a Sunday," he said to himself.

"As we have satisfactorily disposed of the country, let us go on to the people," Bertie resumed, with much

composure. He found a delicate pleasure in keeping his companion standing here in the rain. "They remind me, now, very much of fowls on a wet day, depressed and draggled. I felt so like a fowl myself this morning, that I really had to come out. I wanted to stand about on one leg with other fowls, and make melancholy little noises. There is a natural desire for communion among the wretched, you know. I feel much better since I have stood about here with you."

This was going too far. The Colonel drew himself up.

"I think I'll walk on," he said curtly, and, turning away, passed rapidly down the dripping street.

"He is a very good-hearted barbarian, after all, I believe, though he doesn't like me," Bertie Ames said to himself, with commendable candour, as he picked his way across the hotel garden. "The British flavour is a little too pronounced, perhaps; but, poor man, he can't help that. I wonder what dear Cousin Nell really intends to do with him. Her inventive power is startling at moments."

Later that same day, Philip Enderby had a short conversation with Jessie, which seemed to throw light on the situation. The rain had almost ceased; but the pale ragged clouds still hung low on the hill-sides, while the whole landscape seemed blotted in in cold tones of indigo and grey. The Colonel had been for a long walk. He had been trying hard to arrange his ideas, to make out what was the next step he had better take. To stay and do nothing to mend matters at the red villa was out of the question, and yet for the life of him he could not arrive at any distinct

conclusion. All his plans had been put out; and he found himself stranded in a dull little foreign town, offering but small promise of occupation or entertainment to a man of his tastes, with a difficult and delicate piece of diplomacy on his hands. The Colonel felt himself to be a somewhat ill-used person, as he walked up to the front door of the Villa Mortelli that gloomy drizzling spring afternoon.

Just as he was going to ring he heard his name called, and, turning round, saw Jessie coming from the tangled garden beyond. She was wrapped in a long cloak, with the hood of it pulled up over her head, framing the oval of her fair young face with a dark line. There was something pensive in her expression. The girl had gained an almost tragic interest in Colonel Enderby's eyes since his conversation with her step-mother. Her foes were those of her own household, poor child! It was sad. Altogether, she struck him as a very appealing little figure, standing there among the dripping leaves and rain-washed flowers in the dull afternoon light.

"I am so glad you have come," she said. "It has been a horrible day. Miss Keat has had bad news from England; she is going away to-morrow. To-day she has done nothing but pack and cry. Mamma has devoted herself to Miss Keat. Bertie went out early—he escaped. That is the disadvantage of being a girl; you cannot escape; you must stay."

Jessie delivered herself of this statement of her small woes, looking with pathetic frankness into Philip's face.

"I am wretched," she went on, turning away, and pulling impatiently at a straggling rose-spray, which, as

she touched it, sent a tiny cataract of water on to the shining gravel below. "I want the sunshine; I want to be amused."

At the risk of lowering the Colonel lamentably in the opinion of all sensible readers, I must admit that Jessie's petulant outburst, far from seeming silly or reprehensible in his eyes, touched him considerably. Unfortunately, you see, Philip was not the hero of an admirable middle-class fiction—a person bristling with respectabilities and moralities, whose life is ruled by common sense, and a lively discernment of probable profit and loss, and of the market value of a given article. He was only a plain, simple-minded gentleman, with a very tender heart under his stern manner, and a vein of poetry and romance in his composition which, at moments, sadly perverted the strictness of his judgment. Alas! there will always be men, I fear, in this singularly ill-regulated world, who never find a graceful girl more winning than when she laments that there are creases in her rose-leaves, or sheds charming little pearl-like tears of desire for the moon or some other equally unattainable object.

"I am very sorry you are wretched," he answered gently. "It hardly seems fair, does it? Wretchedness might keep itself for older and"—he hesitated a moment, rather at a loss for the right word—"well, different sort of people to you. It does not seem quite appropriate at your age. But I am afraid I cannot bring back the sunshine for you."

Philip paused. He would have given a good deal to bring back the sunshine for this pretty child, in more senses than the immediate and obvious one. He felt rather fiercely towards Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay at that

moment. He formulated an accusation against her. She wanted to get rid of the girl to serve her own purposes. It was unfaithful of her. In thought he accused her of being a dangerous and unscrupulous woman.

Jessie looked up at him with charming directness.

"I don't know that," she said. "I believe you would do what you could. I like you very much, Colonel Enderby."

Philip, like many light-haired men, retained even at eight-and-forty a certain capacity for blushing. There was undoubtedly a deeper tone than usual in his face, as he answered—

"As much as in the days of dolls and bonbons?"

"Quite as much," said Jessie, promptly.

She drew the dark cloak more closely about her shoulders.

"Do you mind walking with me a little way?" she asked, after a moment's hesitation. "It is so cold standing still."

The Colonel did not mind it in the least. He was very much interested in Miss Pierce-Dawnay and in her future. He did not attempt to conceal that fact from himself. Why should he? Her father had been his friend. Philip had refused rather hotly, it is true, to co-operate actively with her step-mother the day before; but then, that was before all the facts of the case were before him. No man is quite consistent; even the most honest-minded among us can find excellent reasons for following our own inclinations.

Anyhow, it happened that on that damp and sombre afternoon Colonel Enderby had a little walk with the young lady, which tended to make him enter-

tain a much more amiable opinion of Terzia and its surroundings.

"I thought the other day I should like to talk to you," she had said, when they were fairly started on the road leading down through the vineyards. "I want to ask you several things. I think you have influence with mamma; perhaps you could speak to her. It is so dull here; I want to go away. Mamma says she requires retirement; but I don't in the least require retirement. I was much happier at Florence. We went into society at Florence. And Bertie was nicer at Florence. He has been strange lately. He says all sorts of depressing things. He is very melancholy. He sits and stares at me."

A sense of relief came over Philip. He could not have said precisely why.

"Do you mind very much being stared at?" he inquired, looking at the girl by his side, and smiling.

"It is very creepy to be stared at by somebody who looks dismal and does not speak," she answered quickly. "Bertie is fond of reading scientific books about the origin of all sorts of things. He firmly believes that we are all descended from monkeys. I am inclined to think it must be true too, sometimes; for his eyes are exactly like Malvolio's, when he sits and stares, and says nothing. It is not pleasant."

The girl gave a little shudder, and then went on speaking again, with that peculiarly distinct and clear-cut utterance.

"I wish mamma would go back to England. She says it is too expensive, and that the climate does not suit her. But I want to see it. English girls have so

much more liberty; they have so many amusements. I should like England."

Colonel Enderby stopped. This struck him as rather a happy idea. Jessie stopped too, and turned to him. They were standing beneath one of the crooked dwarfed fir trees bordering the carriage-road, about halfway down to the iron gates.

"Ah! you want to go to England?" he said briefly.

"Yes; I want immensely to go. We could settle down and really know people. Here everybody whom we know goes away, sooner or later. Only Bertie, and Mamma, and I remain."

"You want me to ask Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay to take you home to England?" said Philip.

"Ah, do, do!" cried the girl, softly, but fervently.

She clasped her pretty white hands in an imploring manner, while her long cloak, flying back in a sudden gust of wind, revealed her slim, graceful figure. Colonel Enderby's heart warmed sensibly towards this charming young lady. She confided in him with such engaging frankness. He felt more at home with her too, out of doors in the gloom and wet, than in the lofty rooms and amid the faded elegancies of the little red villa.

"I'll talk to Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay," he said, after a moment's reflection. "I believe it would be an excellent plan. I dare say I could be of some use to you—find you rooms, you know, and that sort of thing. Then you might have a couple of months in London during the season, and come down into Midlandshire afterwards. Your father," he added gently, "was a Midlandshire man; you would like to see his county, wouldn't you?"

Whether it was the prospect of seeing poor Beau Pierce-Dawnay's native county, or whether other and less retrospective enjoyments floated before Jessie's eyes, I cannot say; but she certainly smiled upon her companion with a brilliant and delighted smile.

"Ah! I knew you would help me," she said.

"Meanwhile," Philip went on, "we must try to make things a little more cheerful for you here. Let me see, to-day's Thursday. Suppose you and Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay come and dine with me at the Grand Hotel on Saturday, if it's fine? There's a very nice restaurant opening out into the garden, you know. It wouldn't be exciting exactly, but it would be a little change."

"It would be delightful," answered Jessie. "I like going out. I like a restaurant. I like the lights, and the people moving about, and the little tables, and the tinkle of the glasses and things."

Philip smiled. It touched him, somehow. There was a wonderful freshness and response in this young nature.

"You have a great faculty for enjoyment," he said, with a certain tone of regret in his voice.

By contrast he felt very old at that moment. The Colonel, who so far had accepted his increasing years with praiseworthy indifference and resignation, was dimly conscious of entertaining a deepening grudge against them.

"The rain is coming on again," he continued, after a minute's silence. "We'd better walk back to the villa—I mustn't let you get wet."

"One moment," cried the girl. "About England—you must be a little careful how you approach mamma.

She may not like it. You need not say that the suggestion came originally from me, need you?"

Undoubtedly, Jessie was very engaging just then. Her innocent flower of a face upturned, her sweet round mouth a little open, her whole attitude questioning and eager.

"You want very much to go?" asked the Colonel. He watched the girl keenly.

"Yes, yes, dreadfully," she replied.

"Very well; I will do my best. I will be a model of discretion. But now we must turn back; the rain 'll be down on us in five minutes."

"Jessie, Jessie! where have you been?" cried Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay, as her step-daughter entered the chilly hall of the Villa Mortelli some ten minutes later. "We have been greatly alarmed about you. Antonio and Parker have been searching for you high and low."

In point of fact, the whole of Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's household were gathered together in the hall:—Antonio, in his embroidered smoking-cap and gold-rimmed spectacles; Parker, upright and severe; Marie, the waiting-maid, with her square Swiss figure and high cheek-bones; Miss Keat, her mild, frog-like countenance and pale, protuberant eyes still bearing testimony to the tears shed over her packing, and her grey alpaca gown having a limpness of outline about it wholly consonant with a depressed mental attitude. Bertie Ames was standing near his handsome cousin, a rather inscrutable expression in his face. And, finally, Malvolio—clothed in a little red jacket, with a big frill round the neck of it, his long brown arms showing particularly lean and skinny out of the short open sleeves—filled, apparently, with an unwonted

spirit of revelry, performed a series of wild and impish gymnastics about the shining marble balusters of the staircase in the background.

"We have been alarmed about you, Jessie," repeated Eleanor. "Nobody knew you had gone out. I have been very much agitated."

The girl pushed back the dark hood from her bright hair; her eyes were dancing; the moist air and exercise had deepened the delicate pink in her cheeks. There was a dainty air of defiance about her, a sudden assertion of personal liberty, as she stood in the middle of the inquiring group.

"I was quite safe," she said, clearly. "Colonel Enderby has been good enough to relieve the tedium of a very dull day by taking me for a walk."

"Oh, really!" murmured Mr. Ames, under his breath.

"You should have left word, Jessie, and saved us this anxiety," said her step-mother; but she spoke less urgently than at first.

That excellent woman, Parker, with many dismal observations regarding the dire consequences of wet boots, drove, without more ado, the young lady upstairs in front of her. Miss Keat's short round person disappeared too, presumably in the direction of her half-filled trunks.

Philip waited only a few minutes. He excused himself, and started back through the now pouring rain for the town. Decidedly there was something unpleasantly mysterious about the atmosphere of the Villa Mortelli: and yet, on the whole, he was glad that Mr. Drake had started alone that morning for Spezia.

CHAPTER VI.

A SEARCH FOR A VOCATION.

IN England it is, of course, an acknowledged fact that marriages are made in heaven. In other countries—as Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay had occasion to point out to Colonel Enderby—they are chiefly made by the parents and guardians of the contracting parties. This, on the face of it, would not seem to be an unreasonable custom; but—in theory, anyway—British sentiment revolts against it.

British sentiment is a very remarkable and curious thing. It is worth thinking about; worth thinking about for the same reason that the origin of matter, and the origin of evil—I do not wish to bracket the two together in thought, only in speech—let us, by all means, avoid the heresy of the Manichees!—and the origin of life, and a good many other profound subjects are worth thinking about, namely, because they are incomprehensible. British sentiment is entirely incomprehensible. It has a fine disregard both for logic and for experience. If carefully considered, it may generally be found to embody an impressive and apparently successful denial of the axiom that it is impossible at one and the same time to serve both God and mammon. And out of this statement there grows a second thought—a gently entertaining one to the social historian, whose business it fortunately is, not to teach zealously, but to observe faithfully, and then set down his observations. With what vigour and dignified alacrity the respectable Englishman

entrenches himself behind his open Bible, and flings a text—almost any one will do—in your inquiring face; and with what consistent and high-handed indifference he treats the practical application of the majority of scriptural injunctions in daily life. If closely examined, the attitude of the said respectable Englishman presents a matter for sincere tears, or equally sincere laughter, as you regard it from the ideal or the realistic standpoint. We do not pretend to deal in the ideal, and therefore may permit ourselves a comfortable little chuckle.

But to return to the text. English marriages are made in heaven—which, being interpreted, means that the ordinary Anglo-Saxon is a very quiet and domestic sort of animal, who requires a wife. Having, however, at the same time, a curious necessity for the backing up of his own inclination with not only the Divine sanction, but with a warm and overflowing Divine approval, he has exalted marriage to the very highest place in the catalogue of good works, and has indeed made a virtue of necessity with a vengeance. British sentiment has come in, too, in all the force of its corporate strength, and has positively inundated us with admirable views on this subject, concerning which it has evolved a whole literature of fiction and biography. Far be it from me to speak lightly of that literature. It commands my highest respect; it is excellent; it is salutary; but it is also slightly inartistic, and may be briefly described as the apotheosis of suburban villas, solid worth, and side-whiskers.

If, in that humble, teachable, scientific spirit in which the social historian seeks to approach all phenomena and all questions presented to him—desir-

ing always and only more clear understanding and fuller light—if, I say, he ventures to ask mildly:—And what about those marriages which expose the deplorable category of their conjugal infelicities to public scrutiny in the Divorce Court; or those other still sadder marriages, that end amid brutal words, and yet more brutal actions; or, again, those other marriages which drag on with distaste and recriminations, or, at best, dull paralyzing indifference and coldness, through long, weary years—are all these made in heaven? British sentiment, backed by British respectability, begs the inquirer, first of all, “not to be coarse;” and then goes on to inform him that these are not true marriages at all—“the people never really loved one another!” Well, that, of course, would be a most consolatory explanation of distressing phenomena, if one could accept it. Only, unluckily, observation and experience do not bear it out very fully.

For, alas! love—the love that leads to marriage—whether that marriage prove a very crown of life, or a gateway opening into regions most distinctly purgatorial—would hardly seem to be pre-ordained and predestinate, let down bodily from above. Experience rarely justifies these exalted notions of supreme destiny or of diligent arrangement on the part of the Higher Powers. In nine cases out of ten, that love is more the result of propinquity than of predestination. No celestial architect is required to raise for Love a fair and fateful dwelling-place, let British sentiment, arm-in-arm with British respectability, frown and thunder as they may. The house of Love may be builded easily enough by anyman and woman, out of such commonplace materials

as a dance, or a song, a light laugh, a lingering pressure of hands, or those meaningless tears that come so easily into a young girl's eyes.

Love would seem to be very humble-minded. He bids no heralds and ambassadors go before him, with blare of trumpets and waving of banners. He comes at haphazard along quiet country lanes, among gleams of moonlight over dewy lawns; he meets us on the crowded city crossing, amid the shouts of the drivers, and under the very feet of the omnibus horses; he has even taken to travelling in prosaic railway carriages in these latter days, and that with a disregard of class almost painfully democratic. He is quick, and subtle, and fearless; yet he comes softly and silently, stealing up without observation. And at first we laugh at his pretty face, which is the face of a merry, earthly child; but his hands, when we take them, grasp like hands of iron, and his strength is as the strength of a giant, and his heart is as the heart of a tyrant. And he gives us to drink of a cup in which sweet is mingled with bitter; and the sweet, too often, is soon forgotten, while the taste of the bitter remains. And we hardly know whether to bless him or curse him, for he has changed all things; and we cannot tell whether to weep for the old world we have lost, or shout for joy at the new world we have found. Such is love for the great majority; a matter terrestrial rather than celestial, and of doubtful happiness after all.

But it is high time to leave these easily enunciated generalities, and return to Eleanor Pierce-Dawnay, whose communications had produced anything but an agreeable impression upon the mind of our friend the Colonel.

Eleanor, notwithstanding many faults and shortcomings, was a woman of a large and generous nature. She was clever; but clever rather through instinctive sympathy and emotion than through force of intellect. She could boast no general scheme of philosophy, with its careful balancing of evil against good and good against evil. A calm and widely comprehensive view was almost impossible to her. It was not the least comfort to her to trace the logical sequence of events; nor could she lose her inherent horror of individual suffering in a quiet scientific appreciation of the orderly development of the law of cause and effect. She did not care a fig about necessary consequences; but she cared deeply that a man or woman—specially, perhaps, the former—should be in pain or sorrow or want. She had a native impulsion, of which, possibly, she was a trifle proud, to dry tears, bind up broken hearts, and administer almost dangerously strong doses of pity and consolation. Such a woman is for ever flinging herself *à corps perdu* into situations of which, when the first excitement of her feeling has worn off, she is liable to get a little tired. Relations with her are likely to be stormy. You had better make hay while the sun does shine, and keep constantly in mind the fact that it is certain not to shine very continuously.

As quite a girl, handsome, ardent, and romantic, Eleanor Ames had, for good or evil, met with Beaumont Pierce-Dawnay.

A tall, fair-haired young soldier, in bitter grief for the death of his pretty young wife, with a broad band of crape round his arm, and a lovely little motherless child by his side, is, undoubtedly, an object calculated

to awaken a warm thrill of commiseration in every female heart. Eleanor forgot those other gentlemen of her acquaintance upon whom she had been wont to expend a certain amount of thought and consideration. Marriage with a bachelor seemed to her a very insipid affair. The ideal office of a woman was that of consoler; the ideal condition that of motherhood—even of step-motherhood, if necessary. Eleanor consoled the young soldier to such good purpose, that in three months from the date of their first meeting he had married her.

I do not pretend to offer any theory regarding the origin of this marriage, and pronounce it heavenly or anything else. My business is merely, in a faithful and diligent manner, to record facts. Beau Pierce-Dawnay was a great, simple, good-natured gentleman, who, when the halo of romance which surrounded him in his character of broken-hearted widower had faded and he was looked at in the light of common day, presented no very wonderful or mysteriously affecting characteristics.

Eleanor wanted an office. She wanted to go on consoling; but, unfortunately, Captain Pierce-Dawnay did not now stand in the slightest need of consolation. He pronounced himself to be "as jolly as a sandboy," and was immensely bewildered when he made out that his beautiful wife was not at all pleased at the announcement. At last, still both devoted and bewildered, poor Beau was ordered out to India, and Eleanor took to wandering. She had been a good deal in Italy before her marriage, and the fascination of that strangely absorbing country drew her back to it again. After her husband's death she stayed on.

England had become distasteful to her. She had a craving for the sunshine, the flowers, the rich emotions, the glamour and endless suggestion of southern life.

An ardent and sympathetic woman, with no duties dependent on her position to regulate her action and satisfy her imagination, is apt to run a little wild. Eleanor had many hobbies. She could not be accused of riding them to death; because, before the poor things had arrived at a fatal stage of exhaustion, she got tired of each one of them in turn, and cantered hopefully away on some fresh steed. Schemes of emigration, the down-trodden condition of the Italian peasantry, the emancipation of woman, all engaged her attention in turn. One year she was distracted about the sufferings of animals, and made herself sick with horror over the revolting details of scientific cruelties. Later, under the influence of some of those devout and somewhat damnatory British Christians who yearly haunt the shores of the Mediterranean during the winter months, she grew anxious as to the future of her soul. She went to prayer-meetings held in the disused ball-rooms of large hotels; she read trying little books by obscure authors, bound in the crudest, most uncultivated of colours, on instantaneous answer to prayer, and so forth; she subscribed largely to societies for the wholesale conversion of German Jews, and other equally practical objects.

But Eleanor's sympathies were really too wide and deep to flow long within the artificial barriers of any one sect or system. Nothing but a general reconstruction of society, whereby sorrow and crying and pain would be for ever abolished, and a universal panacea

applied to this poor world's creaking joints, half-blind eyes, and open sores, could pacify the passion of pity which was growing within her. She began to consort with rather dangerous company. Persons fluent of speech, and generous of subversive ideas, began to haunt her little *appartement* in Florence, and keep up loud and enthusiastic discussions till the small hours of the morning. When a woman takes to revolutionary politics, be it in ever so mild a form, she is indeed skating on very thin ice. A convent, a lunatic asylum, or a husband—either will do; perhaps, even, rightly considered, there is a certain affinity between the three—becomes imperatively necessary.

Just at this critical period of her career, Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay happened to meet her cousin, Bertie Ames, at the Baths of Lucca, where she was spending part of the summer. She had not seen much of him for a considerable length of time. The two had certainly cherished a species of fondness for one another long ago; but Bertie Ames, in those days, had been a young man with the world too much at his feet to make many claims upon his cousin's pity. She had enjoyed dancing with him, flirting with him, and so on, well enough; but he had not entered into the serious business of her affections. She had only regarded him as an agreeable and decorative sort of superfluity.

But at the Baths of Lucca, in 1874, Mr. Ames presented a very different spectacle to his charming and warm-hearted cousin. He was just recovering from a serious illness. He was weak and depressed, miserable both in mind and body. His large brown eyes had a look of sadness in them which went straight to

Eleanor's heart. An old man-servant of his father's, Antonio by name, and an ill-favoured little monkey appeared to be his only companions. He appealed to Eleanor's imagination, first as a specimen of suffering humanity, and then as a relative. Family affection has a habit of asserting itself with remarkable vigour in the heart of a woman, when the object of that feeling is an attractive man.

Eleanor resisted neither family affection nor the moan of suffering humanity. She devoted herself to Mr. Ames, and he repaid her with sincere gratitude. He went further. He confided in her; he told her the details of that history which, two years later, she briefly recounted, as has already been stated, to Colonel Enderby. Eleanor entered with generous warmth of feeling into the situation. She erected poor, not very admirable Bertie into a hero. She gloried in his devotion to the ashes of an expiring passion. She lavished upon him both her time and her imagination. She realized his sufferings even more keenly, possibly, than he realized them himself.

To do Mr. Ames justice, he was profoundly touched by her kindness. He possessed in a high degree that lively sense of, and interest in, the society of women, which is undeniably more completely developed in the Latin than in the Teutonic races. To members of the former, a woman always has a peculiar and exciting interest. She is never taken quite for granted, and reckoned—as Jack Enderby, for instance, reckoned his wife—as a capital good fellow and ordinary companion in arms. We Teutons are very decent, and a trifle suspicious too. Bertie Ames was only half a

Teuton, and he put a very high value on the enjoyment of his cousin's presence and ministrations.

When the time came for Eleanor to leave the Baths of Lucca, she found herself singularly unwilling to leave Mr. Ames as well. Quite a moving little scene took place, during which a number of excellent things were said about friendship, and the delightful relation of brother and sister. The end of it all was that Bertie, Antonio, and the monkey travelled back with Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay, Jessie, Miss Keat, and that estimable woman, Parker, to Florence.

Some persons advised themselves to be a good deal scandalized at this last eccentricity of Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's; but the majority of her acquaintance, knowing her real goodness of heart, and bearing in mind the excellent reputation which, though a young and pretty woman, and her own mistress for so many years, she had always enjoyed—the majority, I say, contented themselves with smiling, shrugging their shoulders, and observing that the charming widow had exchanged a general scheme of benevolence for a particular one.

Still it must be owned that a decided change came over her way of living. The promoters of Jewish conversion found their attentions quite at a discount; neither encouragement nor subscriptions were any longer forthcoming. Eleanor began to go out a good deal into society instead of entertaining the reformers of society at her own house. These latter gentlemen made a valiant attempt to regain their former position with her. They hinted broadly at the moral danger consequent on putting the hand to the plough and afterwards looking back—looking back, too, in the direction of a specimen of that most noxious class of

mankind which eats its bread in idleness, and hugs the aristocratic idea. They denounced Mr. Ames as a viper, a scorpion, a hateful parasite on the wounded and shuddering body of corporate humanity. To all of which rather violent language Bertie replied by saying in his softest tones, one evening, to his hostess—

“Dear Cousin Nell, I think you mustn’t let those amiable maniacs come here any more. They are, no doubt, immensely amusing; but you may have a little too much to pay in the end for that style of comedy. We must regulate our entertainments, more or less, by the length of our purses, you know.”

It must be admitted that, with all their many virtues, women have not nearly so innate a sense of the lesser dignities of living as men. They cannot—perhaps owing to want of physical strength—pay as much attention to that outward ritual which makes life proceed, even in private, with self-respect and punctuality. An establishment in which there is no man is liable to be uncertain as to hours, messy as to meals, unmethodical in many ways, and even occasionally—though one mentions it with fear and trembling—hardly as careful of cleanliness as it might be. Those wonderful women of the future, the result of several generations of high school and university culture, who are going to improve us vastly in so many ways, may possibly add masculine appreciation of small dignities and privacies to their other excellences; may have learnt to prefer butcher’s meat to miscellaneous editions of tea and toast at odd hours, and to regard morning wrappers as part of the livery of that slavery from which they fondly believe they have

escaped for ever. But, meanwhile, there is no denying that a household gains perceptibly in good tone and outward regularity from the moment a man becomes a member of it. Women are for ever making short cuts to comfort; a man, on the other hand, walks straight along the high-road towards that desirable object, and, I venture to think, generally succeeds in reaching it the first.

The complexion of Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's little establishment improved very much from the time Mr. Ames, Antonio, and the monkey became recognized members of it. Bertie, who had inherited considerable business capacity from his English father, as well as considerable emotional capacity from his Italian mother, took his cousin's financial affairs in hand, and set them on a more secure basis than they had been on for a long while. It may be added that he had an excellent taste for the decorative side of life generally, and continued to create a very graceful *entourage* for himself and his relations.

Jessie at this time was just eighteen, and was to come out, as the phrase is, that winter. In point of fact, she came out very effectually. Bertie Ames forgot some of his private griefs in watching the girl's brilliant enjoyment of society; while Eleanor threw herself, with all her accustomed ardour, into the situation. Jessie proved, undoubtedly, a success; and her step-mother was honestly delighted at that fact—all the more so, probably, because her relations with the girl had not been entirely satisfactory in the past.

Owing to her sundry and manifold schemes for the temporal and spiritual welfare of mankind, Eleanor's interest in her step-daughter had been spasmodic

in character. If Jessie was ill, then she gathered her into the arms of affection, and lavished tendernesses upon her. But Jessie was very rarely ill. She grew up as some fair, healthy plant grows up in a fertile soil, strong and straight. She made few demands upon the sympathy of others; there was a refined vigour about her, and a happy immunity from those nervous affections which so often beset growing girls.

Eleanor had elaborate theories regarding education, drawn alternately from Rousseau's "Emile," Richter's "Levana," and from the axioms of the last Woman's Rights prophetess she happened to have come in contact with. Practically Jessie held to the teaching of Jean Jacques, though innocent of any acquaintance with the writings of that much-abused philosopher, and followed where Nature led her. She had a remarkable aptitude both for music and languages, though the theory of the one and the grammar of the other meant little enough to her. Her talent was essentially practical and verbal, a desire for something articulate and rapidly expressive.

For her step-mother's hobbies she had but small comprehension, and an equally limited interest. Jessie from a child had possessed a great capacity for being bored if people became earnest or imperative. She would just go away and leave them. It is to be feared that her sense of obligation to the needs and claims of her fellow-creatures was not very lively. She loved sunshine, movement, exercise, and all natural objects; she established relations with all manner of living creatures—was friendly with gold-fish, and intimate with cats and canaries. When poor Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay, becoming troubled—under the auspices of

her revivalist friends—about the condition of her own soul, extended her solicitude to Jessie's soul also, the girl met her anxious and penetrating words first with amusement, and then with something very like anger. For, indeed, in the fulness of her youthful vitality and the keenness of her powers of enjoyment, Jessie had about as much conception of the deeper needs of the human spirit as a butterfly, hawking on a gay summer's day over a bank of honeysuckle and wild roses, might be expected to have. She declined to take the slightest interest in the emancipation of her sex, being, as she said, quite unconscious of being enslaved; the Italian peasants contrived to wear charming dresses, even though they might be supposed by imaginative persons to be short of some other necessities of life; as to the German Jews, they were extremely ugly, and, as she added, with an irresistible wrinkling up of her pretty little nose, they also usually smelt.

Poor Eleanor's enthusiasms were met by this radiant creature with calm common sense. There was something curiously baffling to her in her step-daughter's personality. Sometimes the elder woman whose ardent nature demanded warm affection and intimate intercourse, would exercise all her power to fascinate the girl. Then Jessie would smile in her brilliant way, and say, "Ah! now, little mamma, now you are adorable."—But when her step-mother went on to entreat for more love, a fuller measure of trust and sympathy, Jessie became bewildered, even cross, and would retire gracefully, but firmly, to the less exacting society of her gold-fish or canaries. And Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay turned away, sighing rather bitterly, to throw herself—metaphorically speaking, of course—into the arms

of the socialists, or anti-vivisectionists, or any other misery-mongers who happened to be handy at the moment. Step-mothers, poor things, have established a very unenviable reputation in literature. In real life, it may be questioned whether they are not frequently more sinned against than sinning.

Jessie spent two very gay winters in Florence. She was admired, *fêted*, petted. The young lady had more than one admirer whose attentions were weighted with serious intentions; but the girl herself had an inclination to be slightly annoyed with admiration when it put on an importunate complexion. She was as spontaneously merry as a kitten, and as untroubled by sentimental perturbations.

Eleanor's humour, meanwhile, had changed notably during these two years. Her mind had been invaded by a new idea, which came to possess it with perilous completeness and intensity. She wearied of Florence; she began to long for solitude, for silence, for an immunity from the distractions of society. Bertie Ames had friends in Genoa, and so it fell out that, in the autumn of 1876, Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's rather miscellaneous *ménage* removed itself to the comparative retirement of the little red villa.

BOOK THIRD.

LOVER AND MISTRESS.

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH PHILIP MAKES AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY.

IT is surprising how soon you may acquire a habit, and how soon that habit will come to fit you as easily and comfortably as an old glove. If Colonel Enderby had been told, on his first arrival at the Villa Mortelli, that he would walk up there every day for the best part of the coming fortnight, and that each recurring visit would prove less irksome to him than the last, he would have refused to credit the statement. And yet, in truth, he was becoming more than tolerant of that diurnal pilgrimage. I am afraid the Colonel can hardly be acquitted of a charge of procrastination just at this period. Every day he started with an intention of speaking frankly to Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay about the advisability of a return, for a time, at least, to England; every day he went back to his hotel at night without having delivered his piece of advice. It was difficult somehow. There never seemed to be a good opening, or happy opportunity. Eleanor did not invite her guest to participate in any more private interviews. She avoided all personal and intimate communications, and contented herself with being agreeable on broad

general grounds. She was a clever woman, with a considerable habit of society, and she really was very pleasant to Colonel Enderby; but she took care not to find herself alone with him. Jessie or Mr. Ames was always present.

The little dinner at the restaurant passed off excellently; and, as now the spring days were bright and long, Eleanor pronounced this a capital opportunity for seeing something of the country around Terzia. She planned long drives to distant villages on the coast,—charming, little, old-world places, with tall, discoloured houses facing the purple sea; where dark-eyed girls and women—whose pale cotton garments, innocent of starch, present a softness of outline and exquisite delicacy of tone, yellow, pink, or purple, not unworthy of some classic picture—stand in long lines hauling in the seine-nets upon the shelving beach, or lay their week's washing out to bleach on the rough, grey shingle.

The Corniche road leaves the low shore-line sometimes here, and diverges inland among the wooded valleys where the nightingales sing, passing by deep rocky water-courses, where the narcissus, with its fragrant flowers and sheaf of sword-shaped leaves, grows down at the stream-side; by orchards, where fruit-trees are all white and pink with innumerable blossoms, and, in the cool grass beneath them fresh with the winter rains, the fat velvety brown blossoms of the bee-orchis show dark against the full rich green. And to all these scenes Jessie Pierce-Dawnay's bright presence lent an indefinable charm. The girl was so frankly and fearlessly glad.

A certain glamour was coming over Philip En-

derby's spirit. He was in no haste to urge the return to England. Spezia had faded into the far distance. Poor Mr. Drake might continue his little tour alone. The Colonel was growing curiously reconciled to this idle manner of life. He was very well contented, especially when Mr. Ames—to whom in private he occasionally applied not very flattering epithets—and his monkey were out of the way. He began to have some warmer feeling than mere toleration for those large, faded, shady rooms at the Villa Mortelli. He was, in fact, insensibly collecting a gallery of pleasing mental pictures, in every one of which the central figure was that of a fair girl,—leaning back in a carriage, her hands full of flowers, while the fresh sea-wind ruffled her hair; loitering in the sunny terrace under the shade of a red umbrella; wandering among the tangled luxuriance of the neglected garden; sitting and playing brilliant vivid music at the piano, in a dusky corner of the large drawing-room; now and then a trifle tired or pensive, asking some small service which it was a tender privilege to render her. Ah! really Colonel Enderby was very well entertained just now. He did not analyze the situation, but he most distinctly appreciated it.

On the second Sunday of his stay at Terzia, it happened that he did not make his way up to the villa till quite late. Several things detained him, and combined to induce in him a humour not completely in sympathy with the atmosphere of that peculiarly constituted establishment.

In the morning Philip fulfilled the whole duty of man by attending the English service, held in one of the back rooms of the hotel. There are three separate

things which the British tourist demands, and woe to the hotel which does not hasten to supply them—no respectable Anglo-Saxon boot-sole will ever cross its threshold! Two of these things are for the body; the third is for the soul—a proportion not without meaning, perhaps. The British tourist must be accommodated with sponge-baths, open fireplaces,—and an English chaplain. The hotel-manager at Terzia had early realized the existence of this trinity of necessities on the part of his clients, and had done his best to meet them.

Mr. Drake's acquaintance, the little, ferret-faced clergyman, officiated; while his attendant ladies—the good man, being apparently desirous of making the most of the apostolic permission, was “leading about” a wife, a sister, and two sisters-in-law—with laudable zeal, undertook, supported by an antiquated and tinny piano, to supply the musical portion of the performance. The sermon—that unfortunately inevitable incident in the Anglican church service—consisted of an extempore address on Belshazzar's feast. The subject is sufficiently full of impressive, if mysterious, suggestion in the original narrative. Unluckily, the preacher elected to treat it from a symbolic point of view. Everything was diligently explained to mean something else; and in proportion as his grammar became more doubtful and his types more obscure, the worthy little man's voice waxed louder and louder, and his aspect became more combative and defiant. At length he absolutely bellowed forth a string of formless sentences, mainly suggestive of an exegetical and doctrinal chaos. One is bound to suppose there is something singularly grateful to the professional palate in this style of dis-

course, since one is so frequently fated to hear it. To the unsophisticated layman it is slightly bewildering, and offers but doubtful help towards the conduct of life, or the understanding of matters eternal.

Philip, being but a simple-minded person, did not derive any sensible measure of illumination from the latter part of the exercises of the morning. In the afternoon he went for a walk among the hills. The day was radiant, the air quick with the breath of the sea-breeze.

Turning off the main road, at the outskirts of the town, he passed up the steep paved way between the vineyard walls, to a little village church, with a tall red and yellow painted campanile, standing on the hillside about a mile from Terzia. It was the hour for afternoon service. The bells jangled, harsh and imperative, in the high tower; while on the low wall fronting the flat space before the church door, men and lads sat lazily chatting and laughing. The village priest—a kindly bright-eyed man, in a worn cassock and rusty skull-cap—wandered, his hands clasped behind him and his tall lean figure somewhat bent, from group to group, speaking a word to one and another with genial familiarity.

Inside the church, dim with the coloured gloom of stained windows and frescoed walls, a large company of peasant women sat or knelt, the gay silk handkerchiefs tied over their heads making them look like a great bed of gaudy spring tulips. The air was warm and heavy with a lingering odour of incense; there was a suppressed murmur of voices, stir of footsteps, and rustle of garments.

In his character of English traveller, Philip felt he

had a right to look at anything that presented itself. He stepped within the open church door; but, I grieve to say, there were certain uncultivated and Protestant tendencies in his spiritual constitution which prevented his being in very warm sympathy with the scene. He loved out-of-doors; and Catholicism, with all its splendour and wide appeal to the imagination, has little enough of out-of-doors about it. It lets in the sunshine through cunningly painted glass, on which it has portrayed the orthodox conception of the ends and aims of mortal existence. Our friend the Colonel was tempted to fancy the white light of truth painfully obscured by passing through this coloured medium.

Be that as it may, he had soon seen as much as he cared to see of the village church. He turned up a narrow path at the back of it, and, after passing through the belt of olive trees—whose tremulous silvery shade is not so much shade, after all, as broken light—through thickets of myrtle and tall Mediterranean heath, on the straight spires of which the withered blossoms showed golden brown, he reached the outer edge of the pine woods high on the mountain-side.

Far below lay the vineyards and gardens, and the houses of the town glittering in the keen dazzling light. Beyond, the sea stretched away to the southern horizon. The bells of the little village church clanged out wildly for a few minutes more, and then, with a final crash and bang, ceased suddenly. No sound broke the silence save the whisper of the wind in the pine trees, rising and falling in a soft and rhythmic cadence, like that of summer waves on a quiet sandy shore. A glad repose, a sabbath stillness, came over the beautiful land.

Philip Enderby threw himself at full length on the deep brown bed of fallen pine-needles; and as he lay there in the warm sunshine, looking up at the red-barked branches, and dark glossy foliage of the trees outlined clear and sharp against the deep blue-purple of the sky, pleasant thoughts and hopes came to him. Formless hopes that he could hardly have set out in words, yet which brought to his soul deeper meaning than all the ungainly profundity of the sermon he had listened to that morning, and a larger peace and promise than that imaged forth in the rich gloom of the church, with its half-seen pictures and banners, down below.

Yes, let excited philanthropists, and humanitarian ecclesiastics, and other energetic, and actively virtuous persons say what they may,—it is very good at times to get away into silence and solitude. To get away from all the noise and struggle of man, with his arts and sciences and magnificent schemes, so often abortive, and his poor little space of anxious, self-conscious years, and his mixed motives and feverish efforts. To get away beyond all histories, with their sounds of wailing and battle, their stains of sin and of blood; beyond all the philosophies, with their vain attempts to square the circle and reconcile that which can never be reconciled; beyond all the formulas and all the creeds, with their bitter hatreds, their arbitrary assertions and negations; beyond, yes, beyond, the very sense of right and wrong itself, back, back to the great serene heart of Nature—a heart beating with primal and exhaustless energy, yet calm and restrained; filled with the rapture and repose of limitless power and victorious attainment. It is good to get back and lie on the

warm bosom of the eternal mother, the folds of whose garments are the high mountains, whose feet are set in the laughing ocean, and whose life is the life of the world;—to lie there, while the soul slips away from the sense of its own paltry joys and sorrows, from the narrow hopes and fears of the individual lot; to be made one with the glorious order of created things, the flesh and spirit no longer conscious of weary fightings and divisions; to dream of the everlasting mysteries of birth and growth, and of the fulness of strength and of the failing of strength, and of decay—and of the mystery of transmuted force, of life again returning out of death, to begin once more the ceaseless round of existence anew; to dream of the mystery of night and morning, summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, rain and shine, while through all the countless ages the Eternal Wisdom and Goodness broods for ever over the broad bright land and sea. “What is man that Thou art mindful of him?” Get back, back to the mother of all, and listen,—peradventure she may speak to you.

Philip Enderby, lying there under the pine trees, in the afternoon sunshine, had a perception of unspeakable trust and confidence, of belief in a final reconciliation far away, far off out of mortal sight. For a little space he dimly grasped the strange secret of the Buddhist Nirvana—that state of acquiescent contemplation, passionless and impersonal, without movement, without desire, which, in the estimation of some of the purest spirits, constitutes the highest conception of perfect and enduring bliss.

“Thank God for this beautiful world,” he said to himself quietly and reverently.

The sun was sloping towards the west, and the shadows were growing long, when he rose up at last. Voices of the peasants making their way back from the village church came up on the sea-breeze from the winding paths below. The spell indeed was broken, but the impression it had made remained for a while yet. Philip wandered down towards the vineyards, amazed, filled with a solemn gladness—like a man who has seen a vision, and spoken, face to face, with the gods.

But alas! these happy moments of clear insight and illumination are but moments after all. The discords of our over-civilized and artificial life soon drown the music of the spheres; the fair face of heaven is too soon obscured again by storms of passion; while jealousy, self-will, hatred, and fear, like evil beasts, root up and trample underfoot the fruitful land. “Man never continueth in one stay”—which is, after all, extremely fortunate for the dramatist and writer of fiction. Let us console ourselves!—for indeed life at this admirably ideal level would interfere fatally with our excellent system of large profits and quick returns.

Colonel Enderby, as he loitered among the olives, thought that perhaps he would not go up to the Villa Mortelli at all that evening. The silent hour on the mountain-side had done much to loosen the chain of habit that was fastening on him. He was aware of a sudden sense of aloofness from the life of the villa—from Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay with her sad secret and dark beauty; from Bertie Ames, with his soft voice and air of a mild Mephistopheles. He had drunk deep of the cup of nature. He could hardly go straight back and drink their thin *vin ordinaire*, and listen to the

social gossip of a lady who was more than half in love with a gentleman of rather shady antecedents; who, on his part, was greatly disposed to adore her step-daughter. The good Colonel, you see, permitted himself to state the case a trifle coarsely just then, and the contrast it offered to his late emotions was too glaring. He paused with a slight movement of disgust.

He leaned against the gnarled grey trunk of one of the old olives, and felt for his cigar-case. He had been a good deal moved. A smoke would steady him.

"Decidedly," he muttered, "I am not quite in the humour for those people just now."

Yet in saying this the Colonel was conscious of making a mental reservation. "Those people" did not include Jessie, somehow. He thought, with a sense of relief, of the girl's bright glancing looks and guileless laughter. She was as fresh and natural, and far from all subtle under-current of sinister meaning, as the resinous scent of the pine-trees, or the babble and glitter of the mountain streams.

"She would understand it all well enough," he thought. His clear eyes softened, and he smiled quietly to himself. "She would never strike a false note, or be out of tune with feelings like these."

Colonel Enderby's smile broadened a little. It changed its character from tenderness to amusement.

"I wonder which of my feelings she would be out of tune with, though?" he added. "I am afraid I am beginning to be a little too much aware of that young lady. Is it possible that she is growing dangerous?"

He walked on down the hillside, not looking very carefully where he was going, but following the path mechanically.

"If they do go back to England, half a dozen good-looking young fellows will be over head and ears in love with her in the first month."

It was surprising how vindictive he felt at the thought of those same good-looking young fellows.

"And why the devil shouldn't they be in love with her? What more reasonable? And what possible concern is it of mine?"

Colonel Enderby stopped short. The vision had faded. He was no longer face to face with the gods. But he was face to face with something which at moments is hardly less overpowering and incomprehensible, perhaps, than the presence of a divinity would be—he was face to face with his own heart. He was conscious of a sharp self-revelation which filled him both with pain and pleasure; with a sense of exultation and yet of irremediable folly.

"I am in love," he said. "I, at eight and forty:—I, who have never cared for a woman in that way since Cecilia Murray:—I, who reckoned myself as safe as a church; an elderly friend and adviser, interested of course, filled with a sort of fatherly regard—I am in love, in love with a beautiful girl of barely twenty."

He was aware of strangely conflicting emotions. It is so keenly pleasurable to have stirrings of vivid sensation; to let the imagination dwell on one fair face and form, which seems to gather up in itself lovely promises, unnumbered hopes, the delight of untold possibilities. And when the face and form in question are those of a young girl, innocent, inexperienced, before whom the years stretch out as a land of promise, there is indeed an inexpressible charm in the position! A man longs to write noble poems on the blank pages

of the maiden's book of life; to keep it free from all smirch or stain, from all knowledge of sin, and shame, and sorrow. There is a passion of reverence, almost of pity, mingling with the love of an honest man for a pure girl, which makes it the most exquisite, perhaps, of all human sentiments. "He is the first that ever burst into that silent sea:"—and in that thought there is, for certain natures, positive rapture, an aroma fresh as that of mountain flowers, a living delight as in the breath of the wind of morning.

Philip Enderby drew himself up to his full height. He rejoiced in his fine physical health, in his vigour of body, as he walked rapidly along the steep paved lane between the vineyard walls. He was still in his prime; Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay herself had told him so, and it was true.

But these gracious thoughts did not last long. Wiser and sadder ones followed; practical considerations of disagreeable cogency. Reason critically examined the situation, and, alas! appeared disinclined to strengthen the hands of emotion and desire. Eight and twenty years is a wide interval between the respective ages of wife and husband. Not only is the disparity ungraceful; but Colonel Enderby realized bitterly that it might amount to being actually perilous. He was not a vain man, and was not disposed to over-estimate his own powers of attraction. Then, too, his quick appreciation of what was natural and harmonious influenced him, perhaps, unnecessarily at this juncture. The high value he set on the freshness and spontaneity which were such conspicuous qualities in Jessie, made the idea of her marrying a man whom it would be absurd to call anything but middle-aged

almost distressingly incongruous to him. Philip revolted from anything in human relation which appeared to him distorted, or approaching ever so faintly to what he would have called grotesque.

"A decrepit old man with a beautiful young woman tied to him is a hateful object," he broke out at last. "People sentimentalize over it and call it touching and pathetic. It is disgusting. Do I want to condemn a pretty woman, some fifteen years hence, when she is at her best, to tucking me up in bed of a night, and feeding me with gruel, and helping to wrap shawls round my gouty old feet; and perhaps—there's no saying how low one may fall at last—to walking about by my bath-chair at some beastly watering-place?"

Colonel Enderby shook himself.

"Pah! disgusting!" he said. "No, no; I'm a fool ever to have thought of it. It's all utter folly and madness. Somebody ought to clap me into a lunatic asylum. A man's not fit to be about loose who is liable to lose his head in this sort of way."

Colonel Enderby dined by himself in the restaurant that evening. He did not feel in the humour to meet the ferret-faced clergyman and his following, and all the other miscellaneous collection of guests, at the *table d'hôte*. He sat alone at a little table, by a large French window standing open on to the hotel garden. There was a sound of many feet in the main street of the town as the dusk closed in. Companies of young men strolled up and down, singing together in full deep voices a wild wailing chant, which seemed to tell of "old unhappy, far-off things, and battles long ago." Then suddenly would come a snatch of violin music, dying away again, as the player passed on be-

tween the high painted houses, into silence, with a plaintive lingering cry. The hall porter, his long green coat plentifully decorated with gold lace, slowly lighted the numerous gas-lamps in the square garden; stopping now and again to exchange a word or two with the Colonel's black-headed little waiter,—who had dawdled out, napkin on arm, to take a survey of things in general between the courses. There was a blending of light, and movement, and rich colour, and light-hearted laughter with those suggestions of age, and weariness, and regret, that are hardly ever absent from Italian scenes. The country is too ancient; it means too much. The life of to-day merely plays like a fitful iridescence on the great stream of memories which sweeps past us with such awful strength and indifference.

Philip had left peace up among the pine woods on the still slopes of the Apennines. Here was man once more, crowding, crushing forward, generation after generation, down the manifold ages of history; the same stories told over and over again, through an endless procession of human lives. The last, the man of to-day, troubled with the same questions, the same maddening desires, the same degrading necessities, and as far away too, apparently, from the heart of absolute truth as the stern dark old Romans of the Republic; or the splendid and licentious Romans of the Empire; or the savage hordes of barbarian Goths and Franks, and Lombards; or the dim, chivalrous children of the Middle Ages; or the glittering, rapturous sons and daughters of the Renaissance; or the weary watchers for the dawn of returning liberty in the long sad night of Austrian and Papal supremacy.

Colonel Enderby, well dressed, well off, solidly English, sitting comfortably at dinner at the open window of a modern hotel, and looking out calmly into the narrow streets of an unimportant north Italian town, was still haunted and oppressed with a perception of these things. The past seemed to over-shadow and absorb him, threatening to swallow up his individuality. Thousands of men had wandered along the flowery path of love, all unsuspecting, as he had. Thousands of men had staked their life's happiness on a woman's smile, and the clasp of a woman's hand. Thousands had turned away disappointed, sick at heart, consumed with unsatisfied desire. Nay, more, thousands had got all they dreamed of or hoped for, and, in the end thereof, weariness and sorrow. It was the old, old story over again.

The black-headed waiter, who had found conversation agreeable, rather to the neglect of more obvious duties, hurried in suddenly.

"Would monsieur the colonel have dessert? There was an excellent *compôte* of fruits?"

No, monsieur the colonel would not have dessert. Monsieur the colonel had arrived at conclusions. He went up to his own room and dressed himself for the evening with scrupulous precision. He stopped a moment in the hall on coming down again, and asked the porter for a light for his cigar. The man brought it and then remarked, as he helped Philip on with his overcoat—

"They have company at the Villa Mortelli to-day. Two English ladies, a little boy, and a maid. Antonio, Madame Pierce-Dawnay's servant—whom, doubtless,

monsieur has often seen—has been down to secure rooms for them.”

Colonel Enderby did not bestow much attention upon this announcement; he was busy with his own thoughts. He was going to tell Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay that, as she had honoured him with her confidence, he would strongly urge upon her the advisability of an immediate journey to England. He was also going to say good-bye. He had settled definitely to go on to Spezia to-morrow.

CHAPTER II.

A SPRING NIGHT.

Good resolutions are a pleasant crop to sow. The seed springs up so readily, the blossoms open so soon and make such a brave show—specially just at first. We are full of self-congratulation; we point to our patch of garden ground with pardonable pride, and ask if anything ever promised better. But when the time of flowers has passed, what as to the fruit? Well, it must be admitted that the fruit has a bad habit of maturing but slowly, and that the wind too often brings it down before it is well ripe. Everybody knows what an unsatisfactory thing wind-fallen fruit is. After all the trouble it has given us in the earlier stages of growth, we grudge to let it lie on the ground and rot; and yet if, in an economical spirit, we gather it together and eat it, it has an undeniable tendency to prove unwholesome, and produce that inelegant and painful disorder vulgarly known as the colic.

Philip Enderby's good resolutions were in very full bloom as he walked up on that Sunday evening to the little red villa. In saying this the writer does not, for a moment, wish to raise a smile at the Colonel's expense. Far from it. To those who look below the surface and recognize how very seldom men and women do actually sacrifice their own desires to the ruling of an idea, there is something fine in such a man's directness and singleness of purpose; in his voluntary self-abnegation; in his readiness to do violence to his own feelings, if, by the doing of such violence, he can preserve what appears to him an ideal fitness of things. There is a grain of heroism, surely, in an honest acknowledgment of one's own disabilities—a heroism all the more rare of attainment because unsurrounded with romance and glamour, because not in the very least exciting.

Colonel Enderby had determined to stand aside, to efface himself, not so much as to hint at his own feelings. They were strong—strong enough in all conscience, as he owned to himself, almost with shame—but he himself was stronger. He looked the matter fairly in the face, judged it, and turned away. He thought it would be little short of dishonourable to trade upon Jessie's innocence and inexperience, to use his love, still more his age or loneliness, as a claim upon her pity. The Colonel, by the way, accredited Jessie with a number of virtues, of the existence of which her conduct and conversation had given but limited indications. But, then, lovers have a proverbial power of balancing inverted pyramids, going to sea in sieves, and successfully performing

other feats of a kindred nature, impossible to a faithless and unbelieving generation.

The girl must go to England, he thought. She was pretty enough and original enough to make a distinguished marriage. She should marry a man, young, brilliant, and hopeful as herself. And when that small voice, which is not the voice of conscience, but the voice of something quite the reverse of conscience—devout persons have gone so far as to fancy it the voice of Satan himself,—when this voice began to suggest objections, to ask him inconvenient questions—when, for instance, it inquired, “What and if this imaginary brilliant young man turns out a gambler, a profligate, or a drunkard?”—Philip remained firm and clear-sighted. The fate which lay before Jessie in the future, it was no business of his to predict. God knew; and it was not for him, Philip Enderby, to indulge his own passion under the specious pretence of acting special providence to her, and protecting her from possible trouble. His duty was to leave her free; free as the soft breeze of the spring night. To speak his mind fearlessly to Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay, and then go away and forget—for Philip had no morbid craving to pose, as a man with a history, or to hug a useless regret—that he had ever come near being something more to the captivating young lady than her father’s old and faithful friend. That was the right course for him to pursue.

As far as his personal appearance went, the Colonel had rarely showed to greater advantage than he did on this occasion. The fighting light had come into his blue eyes, and his jaw was set and square. Strong

emotion, in some men, produces a singular effect of youth. It refines and chastens the face. Philip looked some six or eight years under his actual age, as he walked up rapidly through the trellised vines,—whose young leaves, where the waning moonlight touched them, seemed set in a tiny rim of silver.

By following a narrow path across the vineyards you avoid the many zig-zags of the carriage road. This path comes out on the right, at the foot of the terrace on which the house stands; and, passing along close under the wall of masonry, joins the main road some twenty yards further on, at the bottom of the final ascent.

As Colonel Enderby reached the end of the path and turned along under the wall, he heard voices on the terrace immediately above him. He could not see the speakers, owing to their position, and the intervening screen of leaves.

"I believe he was always a very well-meaning young man, not good looking, and not very sharp, you know. We saw a great deal of him at one time, more, in fact, than I really wished—not that I want to say a word against him, pray understand that; he was perfectly inoffensive."

Philip received a slight shock. The voice—a woman's—had something alternately aggressive and wheedling in the tones of it, which struck him as unpleasant, yet dimly familiar.

"I think it must be the same," he heard Mr. Ames answer; there was no mistaking his soft utterance. "The description tallies admirably, except in one particular."

"What particular?"—this sharply by the woman.

"He is sometimes a little offensive now, at least to me, dear aunt. But people must develop, you know, in twenty years. He is still not very sharp, as you put it; and he is eminently respectable."

Philip walked on quickly out of hearing. He had an instinct that the foregoing conversation concerned him nearly. Taken all round, it was not a flattering piece of criticism; still, he derived a positive, if unchristian, satisfaction from the knowledge that he was offensive at times to Mr. Ames. But that woman's voice? He could not fit a name or personality to it, yet he became momentarily more and more convinced that he remembered it very well.

He walked fast along the vineyard path, cutting impatiently at the straggling weeds by the side of it as he did so, and then turned to the right up the carriage road. The steep slope of the ground compelled him to slacken his pace.

Frogs were croaking and barking up at the old reservoir, among the tall green canes in the gully on the left, and the sharp metallic note of the locusts came from the rose bushes; but Colonel Enderby with all his love of nature, was not in the right humour to find pleasure in these things. His pride rebelled against the false position in which he found himself. The fact of having overheard something not intended for his ears was intensely annoying to him. That woman's voice troubled him. All the uncomfortable side of life at the Villa Mortelli, which had begun to pass out of the range of his vision during the last ten days, rushed into the foreground again, with obtrusive distinctness. The lines of duty and wisdom had showed plain enough when he left Terzia some half-

hour ago; but now they seemed to grow confused and blurred. He felt suspicious, vaguely disturbed. This movement of suspicion extended itself even to the beautiful night. The grasshopper became a burden, the frogs with their overlasting clatter an absolute nuisance. The scent of the orange-trees, wafted down on the soft wind from the garden beyond the house, was sickly in its sweetness. There was a magical influence abroad to-night, as baffling and perplexing as the dim sense of familiarity which that woman's voice had evoked.

At the top of the hill Colonel Enderby paused. The scene before him was a quaint and fantastic one. The usually sober little villa seemed, for once, to have put on a gala dress. The terrace stretched away bathed in pale moonlight, save where a broad shaft of more positive and yellower light streamed out across it from the hall door. The garden was gay with a number of little, coloured, paper lanterns, swaying gently in the breeze, and showing here and there, in high relief, the blossoms and foliage of the adjacent shrubs, with spaces of dusky shadow in between. From the garden came a sound of voices.

But that which specially arrested Colonel Enderby's attention was a pair of white figures on the terrace, directly in front of him—one that of a girl, the other of a child some five or six years old. The two were playing together, running lightly to and fro, laughing and calling to each other in tones fresh and clear as bird-notes. There was a weird unearthly effect in these pale flitting figures. For a few seconds, crossing the shaft of light streaming out from the doorway, they would become materialized, honest flesh and

blood; then stepping back into the moonlight again, they instantly regained a vague ethereal character.

Philip hesitated; he stood still watching them. Under the circumstances, it was difficult to know exactly how to act. He could not bring himself to walk up calmly to the young lady in the midst of her mystic evolutions, and greet her with some stereotyped remark upon the state of the weather. His taste made him recoil instinctively from so very unimaginative a mode of procedure. And there was something more restraining than mere good taste in Philip just now. He was in that heightened state of moral and emotional consciousness, in which conventional ways of conducting one's self are quite the least easy or obvious. Seeing Jessie again in the light of the confession he had so lately made to himself, the poor Colonel was almost painfully aware how much she was to him; how delightful he found her presence; what ^atender and yet penetrating value her every look and action had for him; how terribly sweet it would be to take her in his arms, to hold and keep her for ever next his heart. And yet at she laughed with merry, meaningless laughter, and ran with light quick footsteps after the laughing child, she seemed cruelly beyond his reach, a creature of some young, far-off, ideal world. Yes, love was indeed working. In Philip the dear, tremulous, delicious heartache had fairly begun, and I, for my part, entirely refuse to pity him. The piteous moment only comes, for each one of us, when that happy pain is cured for ever.

Suddenly the child set off running straight along the terrace, looking back, and calling to the girl behind him as he ran. Catching sight unexpectedly of

Colonel Enderby's tall dark figure in front of him, the boy swerved with a shrill cry of fright, and would have fallen headlong, if Philip had not stepped forward and caught him by the arm.

"Look out, my little man," he said kindly, "or we shall have you tumbling on your head."

Jessie paused on hearing the child's cry. She stood still for a moment, and put up one hand, with an instinctive movement to smooth the coils of her fair hair. Then she came forward slowly. The moonlight fell softly upon her straight slender figure. Her head was thrown back, and there was a charming half-defiant smile on her face.

Those desirable blossoms which had shown so thick on Philip's patch of good resolutions wilted and faded curiously at this juncture. The fruit of them, if it ever came to perfection, promised to be a detestably bitter mouthful. He was rapidly passing out of the region in which a man thinks and reasons, into that far more interesting and, also, far more dangerous one in which he merely feels. But he fought gallantly with the rising tide of his own passion. He would go away to-morrow. It would be folly, and more than folly, to ask this mere child to marry him, and yet—yet, how he could have loved her! How gladly he could have consecrated all his life to her service! With what fulness of satisfaction he could have borne her off from this crowded, hot, suggestive Italian land, and watched her nature unfold its full sweetness through the long, still English summer days, amid the broad green country, and in the innocent northern sunshine! He fancied the girl would be far more at

home at dear, stately old Bassett Darcy than in the sultry artificial glamour of the Villa Mortelli.

All this flashed through Philip's mind as Jessie, in flowing white garments, came forward in the cool moonlight. The garden, with its tawdry coloured lanterns, its fitful murmur of conversation, and tinkle of coffee-cups, lay behind her. She was stepping westward, away from it and all that it implied—away from Bertie Ames and his sub-acid humour, away from Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay and her dark restless affection, away from unknown ladies with harsh, half-remembered voices, away from that little haunting evil-spirit of a monkey,—away from all that, out towards the freedom and gracious solemnity of the spring night—and towards him.

Colonel Enderby dropped the boy's hand, which had rested in his. He put the child gently away from him, and stood waiting. His eyes were very clear and steady; but there was a certain pain in his expression, as of one to whom a good gift is offered, yet who is constrained for very delight in it, to refuse to put forth his hand and take it.

The little boy, who did not apparently at all relish this indifference on Philip's part to his own small presence, ran up to Jessie, and pulled at her dress, saying—

“Who is he? What does he want? Don't let us stop playing because of him.”

Jessie looked full at the Colonel for a minute, then she bent down towards the upturned face of the child, and said, with her peculiarly clear and detached enunciation—

“Listen, Johnnie, and I will tell you who he is.

He is a kind friend, and a famous soldier. He has seen great battles and strange countries. And he never cried when he was a little boy and nearly fell down on the gravel. And," she went on, very softly, "he promised to help me to get away from the little red villa and go to England, but I am afraid he has forgotten all about that."

"I don't want you to go away, Jessie," returned the boy, promptly. Evidently he regarded most things from a personal standpoint. "I want you to stay here and play with me."

Colonel Enderby came up and stood near Jessie. Her words had been wonderfully pleasant to him. She rested one hand on the boy's shoulder, and with the other pushed back the heavy mass of brown hair from his forehead, all the while looking up with something between amusement and appeal at the man standing opposite to her.

Philip felt a quickening of the pulse, and a certain intoxication of the senses such as he had not known for many a long day. He would go—yes, he would go; but still, it was not in human nature to cut short the present moment.

"You still want to get away to England very much, then?" he asked.

"I don't care so much about it to-night," she answered, still passing her hand over the boy's hair, "because I am amused. But to-morrow, or the first day it rains, or Bertie is cross, or mamma has a headache, I shall want to go as much as ever."

The tide of feeling was rising, rising in Philip; but he struggled with it manfully.

"I have come to-night on purpose to speak to Mrs.

Pierce-Dawnay on that subject," he said. "I ought to have done so sooner, but the days have slipped by, and I have had no suitable opportunity. I did not forget, all the same."

Jessie looked down and gently patted the child's shoulder.

"I do not fancy you are one of the people who easily forget their promises, Colonel Enderby. I said so just now; I don't quite know why,—but I do not really think it."

Philip took a long breath. He had some difficulty in replying as calmly and unconcernedly as he wished.

"You mustn't speak to me like that, Miss Pierce-Dawnay," he said. "It makes it rather hard for me to say to you that which I came here to say."

Jessie glanced up quickly and attentively.

"I have come to bid you good-bye," he went on doggedly. "I am obliged to leave for Spezia to-morrow."

The necessity of that journey to Spezia had become to Philip, in the last few hours, a formula in which he instinctively took refuge. To him the words held a world of meaning over and above the actual statement.

"It is Mr. Drake," cried the girl. Her expression altered curiously. "I don't care for Mr. Drake."

"Poor Drake!" said Philip. "Ah! I'm afraid there is a good deal more in it than can justly be put down to his account."

"But you will come back again?"

Jessie spoke with a most engaging little air of entreaty.

Colonel Enderby shook his head rather sadly.

"No, I think not," he answered.

The girl turned away, almost petulantly. Her soft white skirts swept against Philip as he stood by her, and stirred the loose gravel, as she moved, with a quick rattling sound. She threw herself forward, leaning her elbows on the low terrace wall, and looked out over the dim vineyards into the deep purple of the night. Her attitude showed very markedly the supple beauty of her figure—the strong delicate line of the back from shoulder to waist, and the graceful curve of her well-set hips under her close-fitting white bodice.

"It is all no use then," she said. "Mamma will never go to England if you leave her to herself. She will stay, and stay, and stay. I do not know how it is, but I believe when people have been some time in Italy they cannot go away. They are under a spell; they must remain. Mamma is like that. If you leave us we shall stay here always. Don't go, Colonel Enderby," she cried, suddenly standing up and turning to him. "Or if you must go, come back soon again. Everything has been so much pleasanter since you came. Mamma has been delightful to me; we have had no little scenes. And as to Bertie's melancholy, it did not matter; I had some one else to think about."

Jessie spoke very simply and frankly looking into her companion's face. One thing that helped to make this young lady so truly captivating was an apparent absence of all self-consciousness. There was an effect of straightforwardness in her little speeches which effectually robbed them of coquetry.

As for Philip, he was hard pressed. If there was

a strain of egotism in Jessie's regret, he did not very carefully consider it. It was enough that the fair young creature, standing there within a yard of him, begged him not to desert her; told him her days were pleasanter for his coming; trusted him thus in her beautiful and fearless innocence. The moment was a critical one.

Just then, however, the boy, who had assisted very unwillingly at this interview, in which his small personality seemed to count for so little, lost patience altogether, and broke into open remonstrance.

"Come along, Jessie," he said, pulling at her hand. "Let's come and play. Or else take me to mother. I want to go to mother."

Mr. Bertie Ames came out of the garden. He leant against the gate-post for a few seconds, watching the group at the far end of the terrace, and then sauntered slowly towards them.

"Come along, Jessie, don't you hear? Do come," whined the boy.

The corners of his mouth began to turn down in an ominous fashion.

"Ah! don't cry," she answered quickly. "I do not like children when they cry."

The critical moment was over. Colonel Enderby gathered himself together again. He had been sorely tempted, but he had mastered the temptation. He would be true to the best he could see.

"I will talk to Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay," he said to Jessie. "You will trust me to do my best?"

"Oh yes; as to that, I trust you very fully. But, all the same, we shall stay on here indefinitely if you go away."

"I must go away." Philip spoke gently and gravely, looking very full at her. "I must go for a very simple reason—I dare not stay."

CHAPTER III.

THE JOYS OF REUNION.

"My dear Jessie," Mr. Ames began, languidly, as soon as he was within comfortable speaking distance, "are you disposed to perpetrate an act of virtue, and go and mount guard? Cousin Eleanor is becoming a little nervous; I am quite nervous already. You are eminently welcome, Colonel Enderby," he added, with gracious emphasis. "Some relations of mine have most kindly come to see me to-day. We have not as much in common as one could wish—my fault, of course, I own,—and though family affection goes a long way, and fills up many gaps, conversation now is becoming the least shade difficult. I have been looking forward to your arrival with longing and hope. Would you come and say something to them? We should all unite in a movement of gratitude unfeigned."

"I shall be very happy to make myself useful," said Philip, stiffly.

He detested Mr. Ames with amazing cordiality at that moment.

"That is so good of you," the other man answered. Then he addressed Jessie, at whom he had glanced more than once while speaking.

"I wonder if you know how extremely becoming that gown is?" he remarked, in a meditative manner.

"It does not much matter whether I know it or not," she replied quickly.

"If other people do, you mean," continued Mr. Ames, still looking at her, and lifting his eyebrows slightly. "Commend me to your fundamental good sense, Jessie. It never deserts you."

"I did not say that," the girl answered, with some warmth.

"Oh no, of course not. If you had, it would have tended to disprove my statement with irritating rapidity. But you leave things to be understood. Your taste is always admirable."

"That is more than can be said of your own, at times, Mr. Ames," broke in the Colonel.

A number of subtle strains of feeling had combined to endanger Philip's self-control. He was bitter, and he lost his temper pretty thoroughly. "That fellow, with his nasty insinuations, will make her as artificial and unbelieving as he is himself," he thought; and then he added, mentally, a certain desire concerning Mr. Ames' future destiny, considerably more vigorous than polite.

Bertie, meanwhile, stared at him with an air of interested surprise.

"Suppose we come into the garden," he said. "Perhaps it would be safer. This spot is exposed; and medical men say that moonlight is dangerous. It affects the intelligence, in some cases. Shall we come?"

Few things are more acutely irritating than that another person should triumphantly retain his suavity of demeanour, when you are conscious of having lost your own. Bertie Ames practised this passive form of

torture frequently upon the members of his acquaintance. He entirely refused to be ruffled; he became gentler and more seriously polite and gracious,—that was all. He was perfectly ready to pardon small insolences, and bless those that cursed him; and this not because his spirit was penetrated with a conviction of the inestimable value of the grace of humility, but simply because it was not worth while to get excited. Men and things were profoundly unsatisfactory; this world is a most unsuccessful speculation, bound to go wrong and prove a bore. To permit yourself to be excited or angry implied that you had expected things to go right, and were proportionately disappointed. It was crude, it was exquisitely foolish to be disappointed; and if there was one thing Mr. Ames dreaded it was being foolish. He did not dread anything else very much. He was under the impression that he had taken the measure of the possible evils which could befall him—he believed he was equal to meeting them. He had not very much, he thought, either to gain or to lose, barring his belief in his own perspicacity. That would be a heavy loss, and an irretrievable one.

As to Colonel Enderby, Bertie had a considerable respect for him. He fancied that he understood the other man's character pretty completely. He knew quite well that Colonel Enderby disliked him; but it would have appeared about as reasonable to Bertie to be annoyed with him on these grounds as to be annoyed with a snail for moving with deliberation, or with a spider for enjoying a diet of flies. People are the result of their circumstances, of inheritance, nationality, education. To be offended with them,

poor dears, for what they cannot possibly help, for sympathies and antipathies, none of their choosing and beyond their control, is simply absurd. And so it comes about that a materialist and necessarian creed produces some aspects of the highest Christian endurance and toleration—a really admirably glad suffering of fools, combined with a beautiful absence of any vindictive desire to bray the said fools in mortars, with the professed intention of grinding the folly out of them.

The immediate consequence of Mr. Ames' philosophy on the present occasion, was that he entertained his companion with agreeable conversation as they walked slowly after Jessie and the little boy down the length of the terrace. His face was mild and serious, his manner calm and soothing. He treated the Colonel as one treats a slightly insane patient, who should be agreed with and humoured. Bertie dawdled, loitered, gazed down over the terrace wall at the vineyards and the town below—did his best, in fact, to lengthen out the little walk as much as possible, and completely to engage Colonel Enderby's attention.

Philip's wrath abated under these blandishments. He thought he had been a trifle rough on Mr. Ames. He did not care to emphasize that movement of roughness. He had plenty on his hands already, without complicating matters by a brush with this imperturbable young gentleman. He dawdled too, and listened very civilly to Mr. Ames' advice as to the best way of seeing Italy, and other kindred matters, while his eyes followed Jessie's retreating figure with lingering wistfulness.

As they went in at the dilapidated gate of the garden Bertie was saying:—

“You should come for a winter, you know. Florence, for instance, is delightful in winter. And there generally is interesting society there; society that presents a good deal of material to the imagination. Yes, you should see it, Colonel Enderby. You would form an element—perhaps a new one. Society would be obliged to you. By the way, my cousin, Mrs. Farrell, who is here to-night, could tell you a lot about Florence. She was there a good deal a few years ago, before her husband, poor Eugene, died. There were original traits in Eugene’s character. Mrs. Farrell had some experiences, I fancy, while she lived in Florence.”

Colonel Enderby happened to look full at Bertie Ames as the latter finished speaking. His thoughts had been engaged with somewhat penetrating personal considerations, and he had hardly noticed what the other man had been saying. The two were standing quite near each other in the narrow gateway. Glancing at him suddenly the Colonel was aware of a singular expression about his companion, of an intentness of gaze, as though he was watching him with some distinct purpose.

Bertie Ames put his hand over his eyes for a moment, with an indolent, half-disgusted gesture.

“Dear me,” he said, “how vulgar those wretched little lanterns look after the moonlight! and yet Jessie and I were rather pleased with our illumination at first. Even now—though I own it is a lamentable exhibition of the intermittent purity of my taste—I think it has a certain value. It presents a contrast, and there is a great deal to be got out of contrasts. They

are very teaching. They make one aware of a number of sensations one might otherwise miss. And at my age I begin to cherish sensations—that is if they are not too vivid.”

He moved on as he spoke into the gleaming garden; and then, smiling amiably at Philip, added—

“Talking of contrasts, Colonel Enderby, here is a sufficiently telling one. It is a little unkind to one of the ladies, certainly, but that, alas! is unavoidable. Just look there, at my cousin Jessie Pierce-Dawnay and my cousin Cecilia Farrell, *née* Murray.”

Colonel Enderby came a few steps into the garden too. He started, and could hardly repress an exclamation. He was conscious of a sudden luminous concussion in his brain. The solid ground seemed to give a lurch, and then slowly settle itself into place again.

Where the four weedy gravel paths met in the centre of the garden, with the light of a row of swaying lanterns falling fully upon her, Jessie stood, her white figure showing in high relief against a dim multitudinous background of leaves and flowers. She was speaking with considerable vivacity and animation—apparently describing her late game of play. By her side, listening to her clear speech, was a tall, thin, jaded woman, who had undeniably shaken hands with the days of her youth. She wore a plain travelling dress of dark material; and gave the impression of being a tired, careful, over-burdened individual; of having reached a state of mind in which she was indifferent to those small niceties of feminine attire, and was unequal to that prettiness of gesture and manner so important to every woman who retains her

natural desire of appearing to advantage in masculine eyes.

As a connecting-link between these two very dissimilar persons stood the little boy—holding the hand of the elder woman, kicking about the gravel with his foot, and putting in a remark from time to time in thin treble tones.

“I hope you have not tired yourself, Jessie,” said Mrs. Farrell, with an even colourless utterance. “You have been very kind in amusing Johnnie so long.”

Jessie laughed gently. She looked wonderfully sparkling with her fresh face and quick, graceful movements. The emotion she had displayed a short time before, when talking to Colonel Enderby, had apparently passed away, leaving no trace, save perhaps a brighter light in her blue-grey eyes, and a slight vibration in her voice.

“I am hardly ever tired,” she answered, “unless I am bored, and then I just go to sleep. Mamma says I am remarkably strong. I am very glad of that. I am not fond of sickness or sick people—it all seems unnatural, you know.”

Mrs. Farrell appeared a little bewildered; she drew the boy nearer to her as she replied—

“Sickness may be unnatural. I am sure I don’t know. It is very common.”

Bertie Ames smiled. He glanced at the two women under the orange trees, and then at Colonel Enderby.

“This contrast interests you?” he inquired.

The Colonel’s expression had resolved itself out of simple astonishment into one of considerable resolution. The position was a painful and embarrassing

one, but he was determined to carry it through with a high hand.

"I believe I have the honour of knowing that lady," he said, with some dignity of manner. "She has probably forgotten me, though, as it is a long while since we met. I must ask you to mention my name to her, to recall me to her remembrance."

Bertie Ames made a gesture of assent.

"By all means. But here are Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay and my worthy aunt, Mrs. Murray, just coming out of that gnat-infested little arbour. Speak to them first. My cousin is not in her happiest mood to-night, I grieve to say, therefore it is advisable to observe formalities."

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay did, in fact, sweep up to the two gentlemen in a rather unnecessarily dramatic manner. She shook hands with Philip in silence, and then stepping aside said—

"Colonel Enderby, Mrs. Murray. Mrs. Murray assures me that you and she are old friends. That was the term, wasn't it?—old friends, Colonel Enderby."

Philip bowed profoundly to a voluminous figure which blocked the archway of the arbour.

"Ah! perhaps Colonel Enderby won't admit the friendship," said the lady, with a large and slightly biting archness of address. "We women remember every little event in our quiet monotonous lives; but with you gentlemen it is so different. A thousand things happen to you, you know, and deaden the old recollections, while we poor things sit at home with our fancy-work, and our memories, and our regrets. Ah! dear me."

Philip felt nettled.

"I too have an excellent memory, I assure you," he said quietly.

"Eh! what?" exclaimed Mrs. Murray, sharply.

Then she turned to Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay with an assumption of great geniality of demeanour.

"We have always watched Colonel Enderby's career with so much interest, you know. The papers have not been silent. They have given us information—very deeply interesting information at times. I have often said to Cecilia, 'I wonder if we shall ever meet Colonel Enderby again?' And now that it should come about through you, my dear Bertie, in this unexpected way, really, you know, it is very, very singular."

The smile which accompanied these words revealed a remarkably even and glittering set of teeth. Mrs. Murray was an old woman; but she was extremely well preserved, almost too well preserved, perhaps. She was stout, high-coloured, and completely mistress, apparently, both of herself and of the situation.

"My dear aunt, what greater happiness can befall my unworthy self than to give you pleasure? Giving is more blessed than receiving, you know. But in this case the blessing seems to ricochet somehow; and in the giving, I too am sensible of receiving, in a measure."

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay looked rather hard at the young man.

"Bertie," she said quickly, "you are talking nonsense. Come," she added, addressing the Colonel, "come and speak to Mrs. Farrell."

Philip found himself bowing again stiffly—mechanically. He had a vision of a pale, worn, anxious

woman's face; and was aware of a strange tightening sensation about the muscles of his throat as he tried to deliver himself of a civil and appropriate greeting. The last time he had seen this woman she was pretty and young; he had loved her devotedly; he had kissed her at parting! It seemed cruelly malicious on the part of circumstance that he should meet her again on this day of all days in his life, when the cherished sentiment of years had fairly died out into grey ashes, and the clear, intense flame of a growing passion was quickening the deep places of his heart.

For a perceptible space of time after Philip's introduction to Mrs. Farrell there was a silence. No one seemed disposed to take the initiative. Then Mrs. Murray began to repeat, with an air of being quite determined to say something, her former phrases about the lapse of time, the unfailing memory of woman, the interest excited in her mind by Colonel Enderby's career, and the strange and agreeable chance of this encounter.

"I wonder," remarked Mr. Ames, gently, "how far one really enjoys meeting old friends. Sometimes it strikes me that there is a grain of conventionality in one's expression of satisfaction. I dare say I am peculiar in the matter, but I find the sight of old friends rarely fills me with unmitigated rapture. You are fond of subtleties of this kind, what do you think about it, cousin Nell?"

"Hâdn't we better go down to the hotel?" broke in Mrs. Farrell, speaking hurriedly to her mother. Her face was burning painfully; and that, alas! did not improve her personal appearance. "It is getting very

late for Johnnie; and we haven't seen our rooms yet, you know."

"Why do you squash my hand so tight, mother?" asked the little boy, fretfully. "You hurt me."

"I too think Johnnie would be better in bed," said Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay, suddenly. There was rather a dangerous light in her eyes.

"It is some way down to the town," Cecilia went on. "I think we had better start soon."

"We shall see you again, Colonel Enderby," said Mrs. Murray, with much warmth of manner. "I understand you are staying at Terzia."

"Unfortunately, I leave to-morrow," he answered. "But I will give myself the pleasure of calling on you in the morning, if I may."

Directly he had spoken, Philip was aware of having somehow committed an indiscretion. Bertie Ames said "Ah!" softly, under his breath; and Eleanor rustled suggestively.

"Dear me, I am so sorry. I thought, from my nephew's account, you would be here for some time longer. Well, well," Mrs. Murray went on, shaking one fat hand, with its multiplicity of jangling bracelets, at him playfully, "we shall see—we shall see. Perhaps we may make you change your mind, you know, notwithstanding all that good-for-nothing Bertie's sarcasms about old friends."

Then the excellent lady, with many expressions of affection and gratitude for the most delightful of evenings, took leave of her hostess.

"Jessie, go indoors with them," said her step-mother. "See that Mrs. Murray has her cloaks and things. You will pardon my remaining here," she con-

tinued, turning to Cecilia. "Bertie, you will take care of your aunt. Antonio can go too, you know, and carry the child."

As Jessie obediently followed in the wake of her step-mother's guests, she passed very close to Philip Enderby. Moved by a momentary feeling, she stopped and looked up at him, with a strange mixture of anger and entreaty in her charming face.

"It is no good, then; you are obdurate, you still mean to go," she said quickly. "I must prepare myself to remain for ever at the little red villa. I make you my curtsy, Colonel Enderby. I have been deceived in you."

The words cut Philip to the quick. The whole meaning and purpose of the man rushed together in one clear, over-mastering impulse. He stretched out his arms to grasp and keep her.

"Ah, Jessie," he said—"Jessie, I can't part with you like this."

But the girl neither heard nor heeded him. Having delivered her soul of its burden of resentment, she turned and fled. He saw her pale figure drift swiftly across the semi-darkness of the terrace, flash into clearness for an instant in the yellow light of the doorway, and then disappear within the house. To follow her was impossible; it meant coming face to face with that painfully playful old person, Mrs. Murray; it meant making a confession which reason and sentiment alike condemned. He took a long breath; set his teeth; and went back to seal his fate by speaking to Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay.

That lady, meanwhile, had, perhaps fortunately, been too self-occupied to take any note of the little

scene between her step-daughter and her guest. She was suffering an *accès* of nervous irritation. She had flung herself down in a wicker-chair beside the table, with its half-empty coffee-cups, and as Colonel Enderby came up to her she broke out into vehement protest.

"Heaven help us, but what a woman! She is the most abominable old vulgarian. She sets every tooth in my head on edge, and her insinuations are little short of an insult. There is a *mauvaise langue*, if you like! Wretched Cecilia to have such a mother! And really it is too vexatious that Miss Keat should be away just now; it is—— Ah! well—but, Colonel Enderby, tell me, what on earth has made you decide to rush off to Spezia like this, at an hour's notice?"

As she ceased speaking, Eleanor raised her eyes to Philip's face. Something in his appearance arrested her attention. He stood still, almost rigid, before her; yet there was a singular intensity and concentration of purpose about him.

The answer to her question came promptly enough.

"You must pardon me, Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay; I cannot give you my reasons for going away. But they are imperative, believe me, all the same."

Her forehead contracted into a frown, half annoyance and half thought.

"I do not understand you."

"I understand myself only too well," answered the Colonel, not without a grain of bitterness.

A sound of footsteps and voices came from the direction of the house. The guests were departing. Then Parker, tall and angular, stalked into the garden.

"If you're going to stay out here, ma'am, any

longer," she said, "you must put more on. Mr. Ames sent out this cloak. I meant to bring one out myself, anyway."

Parker's manner towards her mistress was not weighted with any superabundance of ceremony. Their acquaintance dated from the days of sensible nurse and more or less spoilt child, and a savour of that relation survived between them still. Eleanor submitted very readily to have the cloak wrapped about her.

"I suppose I can put out those lantern things?" Parker went on.

"Oh, leave that to Antonio. You can't reach them," answered Eleanor.

The worthy waiting-woman smiled grimly. "I can reach them just as well as Antonio. And he won't be back for the best part of an hour. The candles are burnt right down; they'll set fire to the paper before long."

"Oh, do as you like; you always have your own way in the end, you know."

With that Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay got up.

"Come on to the terrace," she said to Colonel Enderby. "Tell me," she added, as they moved away, "are your reasons for going connected in any way with the people you met here to-night?"

"No, I had decided to go before I saw your guests this evening. I had already mentioned the fact to your daughter."

Eleanor leaned against the low terrace wall.

"This is all very abrupt," she said.

In the garden Parker extinguished the coloured lights one by one. There was something rather fateful about her tall, gaunt form. It was difficult to believe

that the harsh-featured, bony woman did not derive a cruel satisfaction from cutting short the pretty, frivolous, superfluous brilliance of those swaying lights.

Philip watched her in silence for a moment, then he spoke simply and earnestly. The fact that he was sternly putting out all his own gay-coloured hopes, just as Parker yonder was putting out the gay-coloured lanterns, lent a penetrating quality, a ring of simple eloquence to his speech. He alluded to their former conversation; he reminded Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay that she had asked his advice—now he gave it. She had spoken of her step-daughter's future—let her take the young girl home to England, to her own country and kindred, and find a worthy suitor for her there. "Foreigners and half foreigners," he said, "seem to me likely to make very poor sort of husbands." For her own peace of mind, as well as for Jessie's welfare, he urged her to go, and go soon,—to renew intercourse with her own and her husband's relations, to pick up the threads of English life again.

Eleanor listened quietly. When he had finished, she spoke with an air of abstraction.

"That is what you advise, then?"

"Yes, that is what I advise. I have thought the matter over as carefully as I know how. That is what you ought to do."

Eleanor raised her shoulders irritably.

"Oh, you are mistaken—mistaken," she exclaimed.

"No, I am not—I wish I was mistaken," said the Colonel sadly. "I have found the last fortnight very pleasant, Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay; it is not to please myself that I go away."

He wanted to enlarge on this text and make a

civil speech; but somehow the words stuck in his throat—the speech refused to come off.

Eleanor shook hands with him in silence; then, when he had got a few steps away, she called after him.

“You do not start early to-morrow?”

Colonel Enderby turned back.

“I shall go by the mid-day train,” he answered.

At the end of the terrace he took a last look at the Villa Mortelli. The moon had set some while before. The house loomed up a black shapeless mass, with a window here and there gleaming faintly from light within. The frogs and cicadas had concluded their long concert. Only the muffled roar of the surf sounded up from the beach, and the night wind whispered and rustled among the stiff leaves of the old ilex trees at the near end of the upper vineyard path. Far below, the lights of the town twinkled amid the rich purple obscurity of the night. To Colonel Enderby the last fortnight seemed of the substance of a dream, ethereal, unsubstantial. The pretty play was played out; the curtain had come down; the spectacle was over; the common work-a-day world claimed him as its own once more. He believed, at that moment, that he had said good-bye for ever to all extravagance, whether of joy or sorrow. Wife, child, home—those eternal sources both of purest pleasure and keenest pain, were not for him. He would go away; go back to his soldiering. It had consoled him long ago, perhaps it would contrive to console him again. He thought, with a species of ascetic satisfaction, of the innumerable rows of black huts at Aldershot, of the unlovely barrack buildings and the church crown-

ing the rising ground, of the bare drab waste of the Long Valley, with its encircling ranges of sombre fir trees and stretches of dark heather.

Henceforth, as far as love and pretty young girls went, he would honestly accept his age and disabilities; he would put that side of things away for ever, and patiently submit to consider himself shelved in questions of the affections.

“Upon my word, though,” he said to himself while walking along the narrow street of Terzia, between the tall frowning houses—“upon my word, I have had a pretty hard day of it.”

Just then Mr. Ames, slim, a shade overdressed, and with an air of exquisite suavity, met him.

“Ah! good-night, Colonel Enderby,” he said. “Is it true that we have the misfortune of losing you so soon? Still, notwithstanding the prospect of parting, I own I am a happy man to-night. I have the heart of a child. I revel in the possession of a clear conscience. After all, what pleasure is comparable to a sense of accomplished duty?”

Lifting his hat, he passed on, without waiting for any answer.

Philip Enderby had a momentary longing to find himself opposite to Mr. Ames at a distance of twenty paces, with accessories in the form of pistols, seconds, and a surgeon. It made the fact of his renunciation none the easier, that he left that enigmatical young gentleman behind him in full possession at the Villa Mortelli.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. AMES FINDS HIMSELF UNEQUAL TO THE OCCASION.

WHEN she parted with Colonel Enderby, Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay was in a somewhat excited frame of mind. Like many persons of apparently strong will and strong character, she had at bottom a great necessity for moral support; she was, in truth, extremely dependent. She found it impossible to keep things to herself; she was compelled to overflow, so to speak. Very often she made most compromising mistakes by overflowing to quite the wrong person.

She went indoors, and upstairs into the drawing-room, which looked depressing and ghostly in the feeble light of a pair of candles set on the piano. Jessie had been playing earlier in the evening. Some loose music was scattered about, and a little bouquet of flowers, which Bertie had given the girl when she came down dressed for dinner, lay fading on the turned-back lid above the key-board. Eleanor regarded these indications of her pretty step-daughter's late presence without any very warm signs of maternal, or even step-maternal tenderness. In point of fact, they appeared to aggravate rather than modify her former agitation. She clasped her well-shaped hands together with strong impatient gesture, and began to pace backwards and forwards up and down the whole length of the long room, her black lace mantilla swaying with the alternate drooping and half-angry raising of her head, while the heavy train of her black silk dress

made a rasping noise as it dragged over the marble floor.

Mr. Ames came in, after a while, and came in, too, in a charming humour. He even went so far as to hum a few bars from one of Mephistopheles' merry evil-sounding songs in "Faust" as he came upstairs.

"Ah! dear cousin Nell, you are still up. This is an unexpected bit of good fortune. Let us talk."

Eleanor glanced at him from under her dark eyebrows. Her nostrils dilated slightly. She looked like a well-bred horse which lays back its ears, half in nervousness and half in viciousness.

"I will sit down, if you don't mind," Bertie continued. "I am slightly exhausted. I see you are walking off the effects of my dear aunt Mrs. Murray's society. It needs walking off, I admit. Don't let me interfere with that salutary process. We can talk just as well so."

"She is a detestable old woman," said Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay over her shoulder, as she swept up the room again.

"Ah! there you overshoot the mark," he answered, in a mildly argumentative tone. "She is not detestable; she is only powerful. You are rather powerful too, you know, Eleanor, at times. And two powerful women rarely get on quite happily together. But I am really sorry for my aunt all the same. She compassed sea and land to make good marriages for her daughters, and now all their highly desirable husbands refuse to have anything to do with her. She has had to fall back on Cecilia. Cecilia has a positive genius for doing her duty."

"I always have thought Cecilia more or less of a fool," said Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay incisively.

"Yes; but she is a good fool; and that is more or less of a good thing. To-night I love her dearly. She completely routed our valiant Colonel."

Eleanor stopped abruptly in her agitated walk.

"What do you mean?" she exclaimed.

Bertie Ames leant back in his chair, rested his elbows on the arms of it, and pressed the tips of his fingers together, with the air of a man who is full of a gracious sense of well-being.

"It was truly refreshing," he said. "It was just one of those delicate little episodes that make life more than endurable for a short period. I guessed a good deal from certain things which my aunt said when we first mentioned Enderby's name. I ascertained that they had not met since the balmy days of youth, and that at that remote epoch he had been seriously smitten with Cecilia. Cecilia had also entertained tender feelings towards him, prior, of course, to her connection with that plausible scapegrace, Farrell. I was grieved to inflict any discomfort on her, poor dear soul; but what would you have? One can't too closely consider everybody."

Eleanor walked on again. Her head was bent; she looked anything but delighted at this little narrative.

"I was sweeter than honey and butter to the Colonel, who, on his part, was not quite as civil as he might have been to me. But I bided my time. I arranged a delicate revenge."

"Revenge?" she interrupted sharply. "Why, what quarrel have you with Colonel Enderby?"

"Oh, no personal quarrel, I assure you. He has the liveliest contempt for me; but I don't mind that

—it is a mere matter of temperament. He can no more help it than that nameless but historic person, of whom we used to be told in our youth, could help his head swelling when he eat gooseberries. I revenged not so much my wretched self, dear cousin Nell, as all unsuccessful, unrespectable, vagabond humanity. I have a large share of those primitive instincts of fallen man which make dirty, worthless, little boys, in the gutter, throw a handful of mud at the nice, clean, well-conducted little boys who roll by them, sitting up in well-appointed carriages. I planned a telling scene. I let the sight of Cecilia burst upon our friend as she was standing talking to Jessie under the orange trees. You can picture the contrast.”—Bertie Ames laughed softly to himself. “It was dramatic. The poor Colonel really behaved very well. But, to use a vulgar phrase, it knocked the wind out of him for a few seconds very effectually.”

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay was at the far end of the room. She spoke with a trace of hesitancy.

“No doubt he felt seeing Cecilia again, under the circumstances. But—I suppose I am stupid—I confess I don’t quite catch the point of the contrast with Jessie.”

“Heaven help us, Eleanor, where are your eyes?” cried Mr. Ames, holding up his hands. “Why, poor man, to put it coarsely, he is simply over head and ears in love with Jessie!”

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay came slowly down the length of the room. Again she had that appearance of laying back her ears, and showing the whites of her eyes. As she passed the young man, she said, with something rather forced in the calm of her manner—

"Ah, you think so too, do you? I am glad of that."

There was a moment's silence.

"I don't think that is quite kind of you, cousin Nell," he observed. "Has not Jessie had plenty of victims already? I merely perpetrated a passing practical joke. You go farther, it seems, and with no fair cause. Why should you want the poor man to be tortured?"

"I don't want him to be tortured," she answered, keeping her eyes fixed on the floor. "I have the highest regard for Colonel Enderby. I desire earnestly to secure his happiness."

Bertie Ames remained very still. The air of enjoyment had pretty well died out of his face.

"Pardon me," he said, "but would you mind sitting down, Eleanor? The scraping of your dress is getting a little on to my nerves. It confuses me. I confess, for example, I don't clearly apprehend the meaning of your last speech."

As he spoke Mr. Ames looked very full at his companion.

Strong as Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay might appear, this man certainly exercised a remarkable influence over her. She knew quite well that the die was cast, and that a dangerous and painful scene lay before her—how dangerous and painful it might prove she could not as yet determine; but that it would tax her courage and fortitude pretty severely she was already sure. In her present state of hardly repressed excitement, it would be far easier to her to say what must be said moving to and fro. Yet when Mr. Ames looked steadily at her, and pointed to the sofa opposite to

him, she wavered only for a moment, and then sat down.

"That is better," he murmured. "I am idiotic, no doubt, but I repeat, I do not clearly understand what you mean."

Eleanor leant back among the large sofa cushions. Movement and feeling had brought a glow of colour into her cheeks. In her rich elaborate black gown, with the soft lace falling back from her dusky hair, she was undoubtedly a strikingly handsome and distinguished-looking woman. Physically she gave way before her companion, a nervous tremor shook her; but mentally she hardened herself against his influence. She half shut her eyes, and clasped her hands tightly together as they lay on her lap.

"I intend to encourage Colonel Enderby," she said slowly. "To be quite frank with you, I wish to secure Jessie's future, and I believe that he would make her an admirable husband."

Bertie Ames did not move; but he turned very pale indeed.

"Ah!" he said, with a queer shuddering intonation. It was something like the cry of an animal in pain.

Eleanor sat up quickly. She raised her hands and tore open the lace at her throat. She wanted air, she felt as though she would stifle. It was dreadful to her to see this man suffer—but it was almost equally dreadful to perceive why he suffered.

"Don't take it like that, Bertie," she cried, with sudden violence. "It is hideous. You will drive me mad."

Bertie Ames hardly heeded her outburst. He smiled a little. Eleanor covered her eyes. His poor

white face and that pitiful mockery of a smile turned her faint.

"I understand perfectly well now, thank you, Nell," he said gently. "I flattered myself I was prepared for most things; but one's imagination, I observe, has a habit of just missing what is most probable. One's philosophy, too, fails at critical moments. It enables one to bear imaginary evils perfectly well. It is not so successful with real evils. Well, I own myself beaten. You are the cleverer of the two by a very long way. I had not thought of this combination. Jessie's future demands a victim, of course—but I am to be tortured this time, I see, not Colonel Enderby."

"What could I do?" she exclaimed. "I have suspected—feared how things were going with you; but I did not dream it had gone as far as this. And then," she added, with a sort of gasp, "it may come to nothing, after all."

"I don't think so," the young man answered, with that same wretched smile. "Everything will turn out as you wish—at least, if you keep on."

"I must keep on," said Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay.

She threw back her head; her face was hard and set. Then almost immediately she softened again into a tone of pleading, with a wild longing to justify herself, to prove that her motives were commendable.

"I do it for the best, Bertie. I believe it is right. It seems the safest thing I can do for the child. And who can care for her happiness as nearly as I? Am I not, after all, practically her mother?—mustn't I know best?—mustn't I be most capable of judging? Do you think I could be so base and faithless as to do this thing lightly or thoughtlessly? I have prayed, I have

prayed over it—God wouldn't be so cruel as to let me make a mistake? I have implored for guidance."

Mr. Ames laughed. It was not an agreeable laugh exactly.

"Oh! in that case, I, of course, have nothing further to say. If the Higher Powers have been duly consulted, persons such as I am are out of it, clearly. Still you may pity me just a little, cousin Nell," he went on. "It was my last hope. I hardly allowed that it amounted to a hope even. It was the remotest of chances; but just a chance still. Jessie is so young. I fancied, perhaps, the luck would turn; that something might possibly happen if we could only wait."

Eleanor's expression hardened again perceptibly. If he suffered, at least she suffered too.

"Really," he said, after a minute or two, "my position is a singularly graceful one, now I come to think of it. I have been cherishing a secret desire during the last few months for nothing less than the death of a woman I adored for years—a woman who gave me all she had to give." Bertie paused. "Now the news that she has developed some fatal malady would give me—well, not unmixed pain. Isn't that charming?"

"You make yourself out far worse than you are," she interrupted.

"No, I think not. I appear to be a very despicable animal, and let me at least be honest and admit it. The best thing about me has been my faithfulness to the memory of what was, in itself, a far from pretty thing—Enderby, for instance, would cover it by a very ugly word. But even that last shred of honourable feeling has worn uncommonly threadbare in the past twelve months."

"Jessie would not make you happy," said Eleanor, hoarsely. "I have watched her from babyhood. There are strange wants in her nature."

"Ah! if I am to wait for a wife till I find a faultless woman, I shall wait through all eternity," he responded. "'One man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found.'"

"Where did you get that abominable sentiment from?" demanded Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay.

"Out of that very acute book, the Bible, cousin Nell. They are the words of a person who is reputed to have had a pretty wide experience of women. My French novels, that you sometimes gird at, say the same thing, only they put it in less conventional language. I am as well aware of Jessie's peculiarities as you are; but I should understand her. I should never ask of her what she could not give. I should be contented with very little—from Jessie."

"You would quarrel," she said bitterly.

"Yes," he answered, "it is a way husbands and wives have. Everybody knows that. Still, that knowledge has never lowered the marriage returns very sensibly yet, I believe."

Eleanor flung herself back against the sofa-cushions. "He loves her—he loves her," she repeated to herself, and the words stabbed her as she said them.

Mr. Ames got up; he came across to the sofa and sat down by his cousin. His face was very pale still—it looked ghastly with his black beard and great, sad, dark eyes—but he had regained much of his usual indolent manner.

"Come, let us talk over this matter reasonably, Eleanor, without any heroics. We both admit that

Jessie has certain peculiarities which may prove difficult to deal with. A man will have to pay a certain penalty for loving her."

"Colonel Enderby will love her too well to be conscious of the penalty," she interrupted.

"At first, yes. But remember he is five-and-twenty years older than she is, at least, and he has lived in an utterly different world to hers. He will worship her, he will be incapable of looking at her from a common-sense point of view—looking at her as she really is. He will make her into an idol. Some day something will happen which makes a demand upon her. She will fail him. He is a fine fellow, in a way, though a stupid one. He will blame himself, and forgive her. It will happen a second time. And then shall I tell you what he will do? He'll just quietly go and blow his brains out. The man is incapable of adjusting himself, he moves all of a piece. He is a rigid English Puritan, you know, at bottom."

"You don't mean to insinuate anything against Jessie?" cried Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay, her eyes blazing with a sudden burst of jealousy for the girl's honour.

"Heaven forbid! Jessie will never commit any of those indiscretions that society judges very harshly."

There was a silence: then Bertie Ames bent towards his cousin and looked at her very steadily.

"What are you going to do—let him go away to-morrow?"

She looked back at him with an expression of passionate anguish and despair in her handsome face.

"He must go if he will. But I shall make him distinctly understand my wishes as to Jessie's future first."

Bertie placed his hand on Eleanor's two hands as they lay clasped in her lap. The hot colour rushed into her face, she closed her eyes with a swift shiver, which trembled all through her frame.

"Nell," he said softly, "think a moment. Are you quite determined?"

"Yes, yes," she cried wildly, shaking off his hand "Utterly determined; irrevocably determined. Jessie must go—she must go. It must be done at once."

"Very well," he answered.

Then he got up slowly from the sofa.

"It is very late," he went on. "You had better go to bed. Shall I get you a candle?"

"Bertie, Bertie," cried Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay in desperation, stretching out her hands to him, "for God's sake, don't hate me!"

"Oh! my dear, I don't hate you," he replied wearily. "You have been wonderfully kind to me, and have borne with me with a great deal of patience at times when I must have been anything but pleasant company. It would be detestably ungrateful to hate you. No, I haven't fallen into that depth yet. And perhaps you are right; perhaps it is all, as you say, for the best. Only it is a little difficult for me to take an optimist's view of the matter just at present. I can't help thinking of myself first, you know. It is a tendency inherent in human nature; we all have it in our degree, saints and sinners alike."

He looked down on the ground, and shrugged his shoulders in a lazy hopeless sort of fashion.

"I think, sometimes, I am like a living man bound to a corpse. It is not a graceful metaphor, but it just

expresses my sensations. Lately I have had an insane hope of getting free from the corpse; but I tied the cords myself, and I tied them a little too cleverly. I shall never get free—never. That makes a man a trifle irritable at times.” He glanced up at her suddenly, with a lifting of the eyebrows and a short laugh. “I and the corpse always,” he said, “right on to the end—and then beyond, probably blank darkness and nothing. Delightful company, isn’t it? Cheering prospect for a healthy man of three-and-thirty?”

There were noble impulses in Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay. She had a movement of reckless magnanimity.

“Your sense of honour is overstrained,” she said, and as she spoke no thought of self was present to her mind. “It is false. Go away, Bertie; go away out of this beautiful baleful country, which bewitches and perverts us all—go away and begin over again.”

She had risen to her feet. She looked almost majestic in her dark stormy beauty, standing there in front of him.

In how far the young man had realized the nature of her feelings towards himself, I cannot say. That he had a suspicion of them is pretty certain; for it is impossible that a woman should love a man deeply without betraying herself to him in a thousand little ways. But Bertie Ames was not without gracious and respectful sentiments towards certain persons, notwithstanding his cynicism, real or affected. He had avoided examining his cousin’s feelings on that special point very discreetly and modestly. At this moment, however, he was guilty of an act of cruelty; but then, in extenuation of that act, it must be allowed, poor fel-

low, that he was very sore at heart. To Eleanor's magnanimous outburst, he answered, smiling—

"That is all very well, but I am not fond of solitary journeys. A new heaven and earth seem to demand an Eve as well as an Adam. Who shall go forth with me?—Jessie?"

Eleanor shrank back as if he had struck her. The glow of generous enthusiasm died out of her face, leaving it thin and haggard. She had to steady herself with her hands on the arm of the sofa.

"I beg your pardon," he resumed hastily, filled with sudden compunction. "I forgot myself; I oughtn't to have said that. But don't, for heaven's sake, turn devil's advocate and tempt me. You know just as well as I do that that sense of honour—call it false and overstrained if you will—is the one thing that keeps me from going utterly to the bad, and gives me some kind of self-respect. Without it I should be worth nothing at all; I am worth little enough as it is. I may be superstitious; but I don't much fancy any fresh start would be very successful which began with the throwing of that poor old rag of honour overboard."

Eleanor was silent. Bertie went across the room, lighted one of the chamber candles standing on the consol-table by the door, and brought it to her. Small every-day needs must be supplied, and small civilities complied with, even when poor human hearts are torn and bleeding. The outward decencies of civilization take no note of the more intimate emotions.

As Mr. Ames gave his cousin her candle, and the light of it fell upon her face, he was moved with compassion towards her.

"You look terribly tired, Eleanor," he said kindly.

His friendly solicitude was, perhaps, even harder to bear than his indifference. Eleanor felt ill; she was chilled through, though the night was warm. She, too, was bound, she feared—bound hard and fast and everlastingly to the corpse of a dead love.

"Yes, I am tired," she answered hopelessly—"tired of my life."

Bertie smiled at her kindly again, and raised his hands with a deprecating gesture.

"So am I, cousin Nell," he said, "abominably tired of it. But you and I are cultivated persons, so we won't take any violent measures to rid ourselves of that fatiguing possession, will we? In face of the blank darkness I alluded to just now, it might be a mistake. We'll leave all such desperate doings to highly respectable barbarians, like our friend the worthy Colonel. Good night. Mind you don't slip on the landing;—the floor is just like ice there, outside."

CHAPTER V.

EPISODES IN THE LIFE OF A NEGATIVE SAINT.

As Mr. Ames had said of her, Cecilia Farrell, *née* Murray, had a positive genius for doing her duty. From this statement it may be gathered that her temperament was neither a conspicuously artistic nor a conspicuously original one. I make the above comment not without a movement of hesitancy and a trembling of the inner man. For the word Duty has come to be the shibboleth of the virtuous English in

so eminent a degree, that any person using it lightly, and with an implication of possible limits to its supreme worth and value, runs the risk of finding himself written down as a somewhat dangerous and disreputable character.

But indeed, the saving grace of Duty has been so belauded, so praised, and insisted upon, that by now it surely must be uplifted above all fear of detraction. It is the pole-star of the Anglo-Saxon night. We all steer by it—or by what we reckon to be it—and demand that others shall steer by it too. It appears to be set far above in the heavens, immovable, everlasting. It is a name to conjure with; a fetish to appease; a city of refuge when argument threatens to fail. And perhaps the most engaging quality about this same idea of duty is, that everybody can look at it from their own point of view, use its power in support of their own cause, invoke the mystic benefit of its name in the most opposite cases. One may even go one step further, and admit frankly that the great practical use of such a recognized watch-word as Duty is that the using of it alone is sufficient, and that, having used it, you are then agreeably free to do what you please. Cerberus has got his sop. Go on your way rejoicing. By the majority, nothing further will be required of you.

Only here and there will you come across some sincere and simple soul, who having been indoctrinated with the conception of Duty, takes it home to his or her heart, and tries faithfully to work it out in daily life—a somewhat silly and innocent proceeding no doubt, grounded on an absence of the powers of observation and generalization. This simplicity of mind,

however, is becoming more and more infrequent. It takes its rise in an abnormal development of the conscience; and may be described as a sense of universal obligation towards the disagreeable. It is the occasion of much tyranny in unscrupulous persons, and affords but a limited source of joy to the possessor of it, since he is almost always struggling to conform to a shifting ideal of conduct prescribed by others. It induces a spirit as far away from the strong inward compelling of the artist, or the luminous calm of the philosopher, as anything very well can. It distorts and confuses the reason, and rubs down all the sharp edges of the individuality. It takes away all inspiring sense of freedom, and leaves the poor soul wandering through a dim world, the sport of circumstance, and of many, but most untrustworthy guides.

It may be asserted of Cecilia Farrell, I think, that she belonged to this rare, admirable, and somewhat depressing type of humanity. Her over-mastering sense of duty had caused her to be the prey first of one person, and then of another. It had prevented her abandoning herself freely to any one emotion, it had kept her in a constant attitude of self-restraint and self-repression. Life had been but an attenuated and dust-coloured affair to her. She had habitually come in only for the second best, for meagre satisfactions, and sorrows that were far from being as robust and full-bodied as sorrows should be. Both her pains and pleasures had been set in a low key. Some women would have found a very sufficient opportunity for rich drama in passages of Cecilia's career. But in her case conscience was supreme, and its action was paralyzing. The question of what she ought to feel usurped the

position of what she actually did feel, and cast a dreary blight over all her emotions.

And then, the worst of it is, such a woman gets so little sympathy. A half-starved, quiet, inglorious existence, such as Mrs. Farrell's, is simply uninteresting to society at large. People generally referred to her with regretful, almost condemnatory inflection, as "poor Cecilia." Mrs. Farrell knew this; she hardly resented it. As time went on she grew to accept the definition unreservedly. She became "poor Cecilia" to herself; and this not with any lingering of sentimental self-pity. The adjective had still a touch of reprobation in it. She felt that she was very far from being a success; that she was a slightly inconvenient adjunct both to her own and to her husband's families—a person who never had given, or was likely to give, cause for exuberant congratulations.

Duty had dried her girlish tears for young Philip Enderby. It had compelled her, at her mother's desire, to accept Eugene Farrell. To accept not only the honourable prefix to his name, which filled Mrs. Murray with such lively self-glorification, but to accept also his many debts, his uncertain humours, his ceaseless wanderings from one foreign watering-place to another, ostensibly in search of health, actually in search of "play." Duty had made her ignore a very undeniable amount of indifference, neglect, exactingness, if nothing worse, on his part; for Eugene was not a wholly pleasant person to live with. It made her get over the tender sorrow caused by the deaths of two little babies, who, after the briefest experience of the doubtfully joyful life of this planet, decided to leave it for a more peaceful and congenial atmosphere.

It made her shed tears for her husband on much the same principle as that which had dried them for her lover long ago. Finally, it made her bow her patient neck under Mrs. Murray's not easy yoke, and obey spiritually, while she supported materially, that well-preserved and still vigorous old woman. As Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay had said, Cecilia always was more or less of a fool; and as Mr. Ames had replied, she was undoubtedly a good one.

Mrs. Farrell's income had never been large, and her husband's comforts and amusements naturally stood first in the list of necessary expenses. There is something lowering to a woman of gentle birth and refined feeling in struggling with grasping hotel-keepers and foreign servants—whose respect is carefully regulated by the size of your rooms, and the floor on which they are situated. At the time when Cecilia Farrell met Colonel Enderby at the little red villa, her eyes had grown anxious under the many difficulties and provocations of her lot. Her complexion was by no means good; her hair had lost all trace of youthful brightness, and was freely streaked with grey. Her features, always large, had lost the softness of youth, and had become too distinctly emphasized. Her whole face had crystallized into an habitual expression of resigned discomfort—untouched, however, with fretfulness. Many well-bred Englishwomen—and Cecilia could lay claim to very good breeding on her father's side, at all events—present a singular resemblance to young turkey pullets. Mrs. Farrell, with her small head, prominent nose, sloping shoulders, tall flat figure, and general want of generous development, reminded one forcibly of one of those ladylike, but somewhat dis-

tressed-looking birds. You recognized the fact that she was a good woman, and what is technically described as a lady; but you had a hankering after the cheerful insolent self-confidence, and finely rounded contours of women, either a little above or a little below her in the social scale.

It has been hinted that Cecilia Farrell's married life was not a conspicuously happy one, and that her husband's conduct towards her left something to be desired; still it is only fair to add that, possibly, the fault was not exclusively on Eugene's side. Cecilia's virtues were not of the order calculated to make her a lively and sparkling companion, and Mr. Farrell was a gentleman of many moods, some of them almost regrettably lively. It is a melancholy admission, yet a less excellent woman would probably have had more power for good over Eugene Farrell. Like so many excellent women, Cecilia's sense of humour was radically defective; she took life hard and anxiously—was almost equally alarmed by her husband's fits of depression and by his fits of gaiety. She soon grew to be an irritation, a weariness, to her light-hearted, mercurial lord and master. She represented all the virtuous, tedious side of life to him. In short, he was horribly bored with her.

One day, sitting in the garden of the *Palais Royal*, some eighteen months after his marriage, a bright idea came to Eugene Farrell. He had gone through a painful scene with his wife the night before, after making some certainly not very creditable disclosures to her on the subject of recent losses at *rouge et noir*. The summer breeze rustled the leaves of the little plane trees, and made merry with the long ribbon streamers

of the *bonnes'* white caps. Dust and miscellaneous shreds of paper whirled up in a purposeless dance off the brown gravel, and then sank to rest again. Eugene Farrell curled up the ends of his fair moustache; watched a nurse struggling with a couple of refractory children; treated a smart young person, with remarkably high-heeled boots, to a somewhat comprehensive stare as she passed in front of him; then smiled and slapped his thigh gently, as though he had arrived at the solution of a difficult problem.

"Cecilia grows inconvenient," he said to himself,—quite good-humouredly. "She shall return to the condition of primitive woman. She has all the makings of a capital beast of burden in her. She shall walk behind, and carry the cooking-pot and the tent-poles."

He went back to his hotel, and began forthwith to put his bright idea into execution. It saved him a world of trouble, it is true; yet it may be questioned whether it made Cecilia a much happier woman, or Eugene a much better man.

It is unnecessary to follow the course of poor Mrs. Farrell's matrimonial infelicities further. Suffice it to say that, inspired by the paramount obligation of duty, she obeyed her husband irreproachably; bewailed him when he departed this life,—clad in the requisite quantity of crape;—and, since the attitude of primitive woman had through habit become so very natural to her, willingly offered herself as beast of burden to her mother and her son.

On the morning following his entertainment by Jessie Pierce-Dawnay, Master Johnnie Farrell demanded that his mother should take him out-of-doors at a com-

paratively early hour. The nurse, who should have been his companion, was assisting in the mysteries and intricacies of Mrs. Murray's toilette. The boy wanted, he said, to go down to the beach; so Cecilia, of course, prepared herself to comply with his desires.

He was a pretty child, with a round head, bright brown hair, and rather broad features; quick, eager, light-hearted, moody—like his father. His disposition was good, as his doting yet anxious mother told herself twenty times a day. Whether it was likely to be improved by jealous worship and absence of discipline, was a question she did not ask. Probably, at six years old, Eugene Farrell's disposition had been good too.

Johnnie teased to be taken down on to the beach till he got into the hotel garden; and then he suddenly changed his mind. The Grand Hotel at Terzia was new in those days, and its garden was of very simple construction. A square plot of ground, with the hotel buildings round three sides of it, fronting on the street, from which it was divided by high and ornate iron railings. Four large raised beds, planted with palms, and bordered with flowers; a couple of stone fountains on opposite sides, each with two broad basins, the upper one supported by three voracious-looking, open-mouthed dolphins; and for the rest, gravel paths, gas-lamps, and an innumerable company of yellow iron chairs set in long lines, bordering the pathways, and waiting—usually vainly—for occupants. Behind the flat-roofed painted hotel, with its wide balcony, rows of yellow shutters and red and grey awnings, the hills tower up in a quaint conical outline against the deep blue of the sky.

When Mrs. Farrell and her boy came into the garden, it was glary with sunshine, save where the left wing of the buildings cast a sharp-edged blue shadow to the ground. The long leaves of the palms rattled in the wind, alive with the breath of the mountains and the sea. The windows of the restaurant on the ground floor stood wide open. There was an invigorating crispness, sparkle, and freshness in the morning.

Johnnie Farrell, espying the stone basins of the fountains, quite forgot his longing after the beach.

"I say, mother, we'll stay here," he announced authoritatively. "I'll sail boats. It's better for my boats than the sea. Those plaguey old waves are so big, you know; and then, you're always bothering about my getting wet."

Mrs. Farrell dragged a yellow iron chair out of the rank into the cool shade, and sat down submissively. She had tucked up her petticoats pretty high, with the cleanly if ungraceful instinct of an Englishwoman who is going for a walk. She had also put on stout boots, the upper leathers of which were somewhat crumpled across the toes, and a large turned-down hat, surrounded by a forlorn arrangement in green gauze veils. Her circumstances prescribed a black dress, and her natural modesty an over-jacket—both articles somewhat limp in substance and uncertain in cut. In her hand she held a large white covered umbrella, the outward purity of which had suffered considerably from the action of rain, and from contact with various foreign objects. Undoubtedly, at this moment, Mrs. Farrell in appearance realized very completely the modern idea of the pilgrim and sojourner. She looked pre-eminently not at home.

For the best part of ten minutes Johnnie was completely absorbed in the voyages of his boats across the clear water, under the noses of the vicious-looking dolphins. His mother sat watching him, throwing in a word of warning, now and again, as he leaned dangerously far over the curled lip of the stone basin. Moments such as these were quite the happiest of her life. She had her boy all to herself. She was half ashamed of her own delight in watching his neat little figure and active movements. On this particular morning he looked specially engaging in a clean blue-and-white linen suit, and broad-brimmed hat. Cecilia leaned back in her yellow iron chair. Life for the moment was sweet; it was uncomplicated.

But Master Johnnie speedily tired of his boats, and began to search further a-field for entertainment.

"I say, mother," he cried out suddenly, "there's the man who was up at Jessie's last night. He's going to have his breakfast in the window just behind you. I shall go and have a talk with him."

Mrs. Farrell's gracious sense of the sweetness of life passed away with a flash.

"No, Johnnie; don't," she answered quite sharply. "I don't wish you to."

The boy stared for a moment at his mother. He was unaccustomed to such peremptory prohibitions.

"Grandmamma says I'm not to talk to waiters, because they are not gentlemen. Isn't he a gentleman?" he inquired, after a moment's reflection.

The high treble notes of the child's voice were very audible, and the open window of the restaurant was directly behind her. Poor Cecilia moved nervously on her chair, and her thin face went crimson.

"Hush, hush!" she answered. "We'll go away now. We'll go down to the beach. You'd like to go down to the beach now, wouldn't you, darling?"

But the darling, unfortunately, was possessed of an inquiring mind.

"I want to know why I mayn't go and talk to that man," he repeated.

He stood in front of Cecilia, with his feet planted well apart, his hat well on the back of his head, and an alarming expression of alertness in his small countenance.

"He seemed to me a very civil sort of fellow," he added, with a little critical air, which would have tickled anybody but his poor mother.

"Be quiet, Johnnie," she said, getting up in a condition of the liveliest embarrassment. "You're very tiresome and naughty."

"No, I'm not," he responded promptly. "It's naughty to wet my feet, and it's naughty to take off my hat in the sun. I haven't done either."

After which concise statement of the moral code, the boy took a few steps to the right, from whence he could command a full view of the window, and the table on which Galli was silently setting out Colonel Enderby's breakfast.

"Hullo, I say; good morning!" he called out to the Colonel, who stood with his back to the window, trying—rather vainly—to interest himself in his letters. "Mother won't tell me why, but she says I oughtn't to speak to you."

"Johnnie, Johnnie, why are you so naughty? Pray, pray don't!" exclaimed Mrs. Farrell, red, piteous, and distracted.

Philip Enderby had come down to breakfast feeling very far from cheerful. He had, at considerable cost, done what he believed to be right; and yet his mental attitude was by no means self-congratulatory. He was suffering from the moral collapse which almost invariably follows on strong moral effort. He was not so much tempted to regret his past action, to go back on what he had done, as to sink into a state of apathy and indifference. The colour had gone out of life; it had turned dull and leaden, heavy, uninspiring. Yesterday the world had been touched with poetry. To-day the poetry was gone, and everything had become very commonplace and mechanical. Then, too, the prospect of an interview with Mrs. Murray was far from agreeable to him. Philip had not attempted to analyze the sensations produced in his mind by his meeting with Cecilia, but he knew very well that the whole affair was extremely awkward and uncomfortable.

Among his letters was a good-natured gossipy epistle from his sister-in-law, Mrs. Jack Enderby. As he read it, Philip's heart warmed towards his old home and his own country. He believed he was tired of the excitement of the last fortnight; he longed to get back to less intricate and more normal feelings and surroundings. He was in the act of framing an excuse by which, a few days hence, he might dissolve travelling partnership with Mr. Drake—who was awaiting his arrival at Spezia, preparatory to starting for Venice—and journey back to the refreshing monotony of Bassett Darcy, when little Johnnie Farrell's shrill voice caused him to turn suddenly to the window.

"Oh! good morning, young man," he said kindly. He could not help feeling a certain interest in the

child. "You are not afraid of me this morning, then?"

"Of course I'm not," answered the boy, with a show of dignity. "I'm not so silly as to be afraid of anything by daylight."

Poor Cecilia, meanwhile, was suffering a small martyrdom. She was embarrassed enough on her own account, added to which she was in a fever of nervousness as to what Master Johnnie might elect to say next. She had moved a little aside, and stood in the full blaze of the pitiless sunshine, helplessly holding her large umbrella, and looking a lamentably distressed and dowdy British female, as Colonel Enderby stepped out on to the gravel, holding out his hand to the little boy.

"That's capital," he said, smiling, "never to be afraid of anything in the daylight."

With the fatal impulse of a very shy person, Mrs. Farrell thereupon rushed wildly into speech.

"Oh! please don't let Johnnie bother you," she began. "You were just going to breakfast; don't let him keep you. We are going down to the sea. It is such a fine morning, that I brought him out early. It was very kind of you to promise to go and see my mother. She will be so glad to see you. She will be ready any time after half-past eleven—at least, I believe she will be ready by then. I am afraid I may not be in; but the number of our sitting-room is ninety-six, on the right—no, on the left, I mean—of the staircase."

Cecilia Farrell undoubtedly presented a sorry spectacle to her former lover. She had not been a very effective person at any time, and a constant carrying

of cooking-pots and tent-poles had by no means increased her power of taking the stage well.

Philip Enderby was chivalrous. It pained him to see any woman, and specially this particular woman, at a disadvantage.

"Oh, thanks; I shall find my way," he answered. Then he added, looking good-naturedly down at the pretty boy, "I am sorry I am leaving here to-day. If I had stayed longer this young gentleman and I might have made better acquaintance. I dare say we should find a lot to say to each other. I'm afraid I presented myself to him in rather a disagreeable light last night."

"He was over-excited last night," began Mrs. Farrell, catching wildly at another subject. "He had been playing all the afternoon in the sun. I like spending Sunday quietly. I don't quite approve of going out on Sunday. We might just as well have stayed in Genoa yesterday, and gone to see the Pierce-Dawnays to-day. But my mother wished to go yesterday, and so, of course, I could not object."

She made this confession with admirable simplicity.

As has already been hinted, Colonel Enderby was a little on edge. He gave way to a movement of irritation.

"You still consult other people's inclinations before your own, Mrs. Farrell," he said.

"I say, there's the tram stopping," interrupted Johnnie; "and there's that maid of Jessie's; do you see, mother? I don't like her. She called me a troublesome spoilt baby yesterday. I'm not spoilt, and I'm not a baby, am I now, mother?"

As the boy spoke, Parker descended from the tramcar. The conductor, too, got down off his little platform at the back, and stood aside, waiting politely, as for the passage of some person of recognized distinction. Then Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay emerged from within the vehicle, gave the smiling conductor a royal sort of bow in passing, gathered her black mantle tight down over her handsome bust and shoulders, swept in at the iron gates and up the broad gravel drive, into the middle of the hotel garden.

"Oh, I say, mother, if that maid of Jessie's is coming here, I shan't stay. I shall go down to the beach right slick off, you know."

Master Johnnie Farrell, in the course of his wanderings about the continent of Europe, had acquired a directness of intention and a power of expression decidedly beyond his years.

Eleanor looked extremely well as she walked up the garden. There was an entire indifference to observation, and a certain concentration of purpose in her appearance which was impressive.

"Come along, mother, let's go down to the beach," said the child, pulling petulantly at his mother's stringy skirts.

Eleanor, who was nearly opposite to the group by the restaurant window, suddenly turned her head.

"Ah! you are there!" she exclaimed quickly, coming towards Colonel Enderby.

Her face was pale, almost sallow; her brown eyes seemed sunk, and there were dark circles round them. She looked worn and aged. Mrs. Farrell, with a woman's quick reading of the outward signs of trouble,

said to herself wonderingly,—“Why, she has been crying.”

“I want to see you at once, Colonel Enderby. I must talk to you. I have something important to say,” Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay went on as she came nearer to him. She hardly noticed Cecilia Farrell.

“I say, though, you know, he hasn’t had his breakfast yet,” remarked the little boy.

Eleanor shrugged her shoulders slightly.

“Ah! that dear child again.”

“I am quite at your service,” Philip returned courteously.

The lady, he thought, looked capable of developing dangerous energy if she was kept waiting. He did not care very much about his breakfast just then, neither did he care very much for Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay’s visit, for that matter. He had delivered his *ultimatum*: he wanted to get away; he did not in the least wish to re-open the question. And what on earth could she want with him? It was a nuisance her surging down upon him in this violent sort of way. But then, everything was a disgusting nuisance this morning. Standing talking, or rather trying to talk, to Mrs. Farrell in the sunshine without his hat was a nuisance of the first water. You will observe that Colonel Enderby was by no means in an heroic frame of mind.

“We’ll go, Johnnie,” said Cecilia. She was rather sore at heart.

The Colonel’s last speech seemed to imply something of a reproach, and she was particularly susceptible to reproaches. She disliked Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay too—chiefly, I imagine, because she was afraid of her.

She would get quit of these people, and be alone with her boy.

Parker meanwhile stood a tall black column, in the centre of the hotel garden.

"I must speak to you alone," said Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay. "Parker, go somewhere and sit down and wait. Pah!" she added irritably, "how abominably stupid everybody is to-day! That *enfant terrible* of Mrs. Farrell's is not coming back, I trust? We will go inside here, Colonel Enderby. You can have your breakfast, and I will talk to you. It is simply scorching out-of-doors."

CHAPTER VI.

TWO WAYS OF TRUE LOVE.

MRS. PIERCE-DAWNAY sat down just opposite to Colonel Enderby at the other side of the table on which his breakfast was laid, in the window of the restaurant. She untied the ribbons of her mantle at the neck, and flung it impatiently off her shoulders. She unbuttoned her long *Suède* gloves, and, drawing them off, threw them down on the table before her. She pushed her chair a little back into the soft shadow of the white curtained casement.

"Begin—eat," she said imperatively, looking across at her companion. "I can talk to you just as well so, and it will look more natural if any one passes."

It is all very well to say "Begin—eat," but how on earth is a man of ordinary sensibility, still more a

man suffering a reaction after considerable mental excitement—how is he calmly to dissect a nicely browned sole, and inquire into the inner mysteries of a hen's egg, when a woman with such an intense and tragic countenance is sitting opposite to and watching him?

"Really," said Colonel Enderby, with a feeling something between amusement and annoyance—"really, I think you would find it more comfortable up in the *salon*. My breakfast can very well wait."

"No," she answered quickly; "I prefer this. Give me a cup of coffee, if you like, to keep up appearances; but go on with your breakfast. I assure you, it will be best."

Philip gave her a cup of coffee, and sat down again. A man with his mouth full of fried fish is at a disadvantage, unquestionably; but then, what could he do?

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay was conscious of being a little beside herself. She needed all the support she could get from outside things. This public situation, the unromantic associations of knives and forks, hot rolls, little tables, and all the rest of it, would help her to maintain her self-control. She leant forward and stirred her coffee, speaking all the while rapidly, almost as though reciting a lesson learned by heart.

"You told me you were obliged to go away to-day. You refused to tell me what reasons compelled you to go. I think I have arrived at those reasons. They do great honour to your delicacy of feeling, but they are based upon a mistake. I have come here this morning to entreat you, most earnestly, to reconsider your decision."

Eleanor did not raise her head, but she glanced

up at him for a moment, from under her dark eyebrows. The oval of her face was very perfect, as she held her head in this position. Her lips were slightly compressed; but that perhaps only increased the beauty of her mouth. She was evidently trying hard to keep herself in hand. A strange expression in her eyes and the restless action of her hands alone betrayed her inward agitation.

"I should not have trusted to my own opinion in this matter," she continued, without giving Philip time to make any rejoinder; "but another person thinks as I do, and that decided me to come to you. You must remember, I have already warned you that foreign ways are different to English ones—this must be my excuse for speaking to you plainly, and without further circumlocution. We may be in error as to your reasons. In that case, you have only to tell me so. I shall not resent, though I shall certainly regret it."

Eleanor paused. Philip Enderby had laid down his knife and fork; he leant back in his chair. He knew quite well what she was going to say. Again the queer paralyzing conviction that all this had happened to him before—which had haunted him on the day of his first visit to the Villa Mortelli—took possession of him. It was distressing, yet he could not break away from it. His will seemed in a state of suspension. He must let her speak, and what would happen, happen. He was powerless alike to hasten or prevent the course of events.

"If," said Eleanor, keeping her eyes fixed on the rim of her coffee-cup—"if, Colonel Enderby, you have any peculiar interest in my step-daughter, if you prefer her—— Oh, how shall I put it? If—will you pardon

my saying it bluntly?—you are in love with her, don't go away. Stay. You have my leave to do so. There is no man on earth to whom I would more willingly give Jessie than to you."

Philip leant his elbows on the table and covered his face with his hands. All the thwarted yearning, worship, desire, which had left him last night so sad and hungry, rushed into his soul again. He was a strong man; but he shook like a leaf at that moment.

Eleanor sat up. She watched him keenly and anxiously. After a few seconds she spoke again, in the same low voice.

"I have tried, believe me, to do my duty by my husband's child; but a time has come when it would be better, far better, for both of us, that she should pass into stronger and safer keeping than mine. And in whose keeping would she be so safe as in yours—her father's and my best and truest friend? And Jessie, surely, is a very fair trust to offer any man? She is very lovely, and gay, and sweet-tempered. She is very winning; she seems to carry the sunshine itself in her smile. Her charm and brightness are all her own: if she has any faults," Eleanor went on slowly, "they are of my making. I have not always been very wise with her, poor child."

Colonel Enderby looked at his companion as she said these last few words. She sat staring in front of her, and her face was very sad. The growing alienation, all the harshness and bitterness of her feeling towards Jessie, during the past year, rushed into her mind. There had been moments when she had come near absolutely hating the young girl. She was still smarting from her interview of the night before with

Bertie Ames. She had come to the Colonel that morning in a storm of jealousy, of revenge, of wounded self-love, and of genuine fear too. She wanted to save Jessie quite as urgently as she wanted to save herself.

Things had reached a pass in which silence and denial were no longer possible to Philip Enderby. He had to face the situation and admit it.

"Tell me, Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay," he said at last, gravely and quietly, "can you honestly say that I am a fitting husband for a beautiful girl of twenty? I am eight-and-forty; every year will make me sensibly older. I have not a large fortune; I have not a distinguished position, or brilliant future to offer a woman. My fighting days are, in all probability, over; younger men, men of the modern school, are crowding forward in my profession, and we old-fashioned soldiers are pretty well out of it, so I have practically no career before me. Dare I, have I any right to, go to a woman, in the first flush of her youth and beauty—she has so much to give—go to her like this, with my hands empty?"

Eleanor turned to him swiftly. Their eyes met. She looked him full in the face.

"If you love her—yes," she said.

Philip Enderby took a long, deep breath. He pushed away his chair and stood up. A necessity for movement was upon him. Just then the glad sea-wind blew back the half-closed shutter of the southern window of the restaurant, and the sunshine streamed in aslant the large light room, flooding the spot where he stood. Something more than sunlight illumined the Colonel's face at the moment. It was radiant with

the flame of a great and beautiful passion. His eyes were misty with tears.

"Love her?" he cried, with a strange, short laugh—"love her? I love her better, God forgive me, than anything in heaven or earth."

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay sat still in the shadow. She gathered her mantle hastily up over her shoulders again. She was aware of a sudden chill.

"Jessie is a very fortunate girl," she murmured.

Then she rose and began slowly putting on her gloves.

"You will not go now, I imagine, Colonel Enderby?" she inquired gently, and with, perhaps, a faint spice of malice in her tone.

"I don't know that," he answered; "I cannot say yet. You have been wonderfully good to me. But I must consider it all. It would be too hideous if she sacrificed herself through ignorance—through want of experience. I must wait; I must think it out."

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay came a few steps nearer to him. She went on slowly buttoning her gloves. She did not look at Colonel Enderby, but there was a certain vibration in her voice as she spoke, which was curiously penetrating.

"See, I give you the chance of saving three persons from a possible catastrophe. Think twice before you let that chance slip through some quixotic half-morbid imagination about your own unworthiness. Things cannot go on as they are much longer up at the little red villa. Something will happen." She paused a moment. "I went into Jessie's room as I was going up to bed last night. She lay asleep, with her hands clasped under her pretty curly head. She was smiling,

and her breath came as softly as a child's. I looked at her till—till all sorts of wild, wicked——”

“Hush, hush!” cried Philip, sternly. “There are things you may not say, and that I may not hear. There, sit down,” he went on, more gently. “You don't quite know what you are saying; you are excited and ill. Let me go and call your maid to you.”

“No, no,” said Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay.

She sat down again in a purposeless sort of way. Her hands lay idly in her lap, and she gazed out at nothing, with dry, tired eyes. All her strength and courage had left her. She sat there in utter shame and weariness, while the sunshine slanted into the gay painted room, and the fountains splashed in the garden outside, and the palm leaves rattled together in the breeze, and the ring of voices and whirl of the passing traffic sounded in from the narrow dusty street.

Galli, with his imperial head and pale, impassive face, came in softly to see if *monsieur* the colonel had finished his breakfast; but Philip motioned him impatiently away.

“Oh, I have sunk very low!” she almost moaned. “But you are strong and merciful, Colonel Enderby. If you knew what I have suffered, you would not blame me very much.”

“Who am I that I should dare blame you at all?” he asked quietly.

“I have borne it all so long; I have eaten my heart out with miserable thoughts,” she went on, in the same dull nerveless way. “And I have had nobody to speak to, nobody to help me. Look, Colonel Enderby; I used to fancy myself born to console

others, to reconstruct society, to bind up all broken hearts, to set the world straight. I have given up everything by degrees, all my foolish noble schemes, all my splendid dreams, everything. And what for? For a man who does not love me. I have neglected my old friends, forsaken my old pursuits and interests. He has laughed me out of all of them, with his gentle little mocking smile and his sweet voice."

"The scoundrel!" said Philip Enderby, under his breath.

"He has driven me into hardness, unbelief. He has even come between me and my husband's child, till the most terrible temptations have assailed me; till I have been on the edge of mortal sin. And yet I care for him," she added. "Heaven help me! I care for nothing else. What is this thing love, which men praise and belaud and represent as the glory and blossom of life? It seems to me a very curse and devil's gift. What does it do but wreck us, bewilder us, drive us crazy, poison all that is purest and best in us with one mad over-mastering desire?"

Colonel Enderby shuddered. The words were terrible to him coming just at this moment. His own love was deep enough; but it was of a very different complexion. It made his brain giddy to look into the turgid depths of this woman's heart. Her entire disregard of conventionality, the singleness of her purpose, and the fierce sway of her passion, were revolting to him. He had no words to meet her with, no consolation to offer.

"Hadn't Jessie enough," she went on, looking up with a sudden flash of anger—"hadn't she enough, I say, with her radiant health and youth and beauty,

with all the admiration society was ready to lavish upon her, but she must have this man's love also? Ah! those bright, innocent young creatures are so cruel, so very cruel. Their hands are never full enough; they clutch at everything in their careless, light-hearted, pitiless way. They leave nothing—nothing for us older women. They won't allow us the veriest pittance; they make us starve, while they have sufficient to fill a multitude. It is the old story of the rich man who, with all his flocks and herds, must still have his poor neighbour's one lamb. Hadn't she enough already? Why couldn't she spare me this man?"

"Does Jessie care for him?" interrupted Philip, hoarsely.

"Pah! like that," Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay answered. "As you care for the flower you buy for fifty *centimes*, and let wither for an hour in your button-hole! But remember," she added, standing up, and speaking very clearly and distinctly—"remember, it is all my fault. I do not blame her, and I have no right to blame him. I thought she would amuse him. At first I encouraged their being together. I only thought of making the time pass pleasantly for him. Then, lastly, in a moment of insanity, I committed the unpardonable error of shutting them up together in the solitude of that hateful little villa. I have been a fool, and one pays pretty heavily for folly in this world.—Oh, take her, Colonel Enderby; for pity's sake, take her!"

She turned to him, laid her hand on his arm, and looked at him with eyes wild with entreaty.

"She likes you, and she is as charming as a summer's day. Take her, before—before——"

Eleanor's voice had risen almost into an inarticulate cry. There was a sound of footsteps on the loose gravel of the garden path just outside, and the window was suddenly darkened by an ample female figure. The Colonel and Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay turned hastily round, and moved a step or two apart.

"Oh, pardon me!" said Mrs. Murray, looking from one to the other with ill-concealed curiosity. "I am afraid I have interrupted you. I was told you were here, Colonel Enderby. I was afraid of missing you. I thought I would just come, you know, and make sure. I did not know dear Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay was here too. This is an unexpected pleasure indeed."

Mrs. Murray was not quite a pleasant-looking old lady. Her eyes were small and twinkling; her red-brown hair—still suspiciously unfaded—was waved and puffed out over her ears. There was a disagreeably vivid colour upon her large cheeks and thin lips. She was extremely gracious and forthcoming; but one might detect a certain watchfulness and hardness behind her genial manner. Red Riding Hood's grandmother when she lay snugly in bed, with the white night-cap tied so neatly under the long lower jaw, making caressing speeches to that historic but unfortunate little maiden, must have looked a good deal as Mrs. Murray did at moments, I think.

Eleanor gathered herself together in an instant. She regained her usual fine manner, and looked very handsome, if a trifle fierce, as she bowed and slowly settled her mantle into its place, with sundry dainty pattings and smoothings. She was pale still, and the dark shade round her eyes had grown almost livid. But the elder lady's presence seemed to galvanize her

into calm and self-control with remarkable promptitude.

"Now, I see I am in the way," Mrs. Murray continued. "Don't pray let me interrupt you. I should never forgive myself if I interrupted you."

"You don't interrupt us, believe me," responded Eleanor, with dangerous sweetness. "I was just going."

"Ah, now, I am distressed—really distressed!" cried the other lady, looking from one to the other with sharp, comprehensive glances; under which, it must be owned, Philip reddened slightly. "But I just looked in on my way to join Cecilia and our precious boy. I was passing, you see, and I should have so regretted missing Colonel Enderby altogether."

"I must go," said Eleanor. "Please call Parker, Colonel Enderby. You will find her waiting in the hall. I'll go down to the gate and stop the tram."

As she spoke, she swept out of the window, past Mrs. Murray, and into the glare of the hot sunny garden.

"Ah! my dear Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay," cried Mrs. Murray after her, "one moment. I have been so wishing to express our sense of your kindness in——"

But the lady addressed walked straight on, her head erect, her arms folded, her full crisp skirts dragging behind her over the path. Mrs. Murray's words died away; the geniality, too, died out of her countenance.

"Does the woman intend to be impertinent, I wonder?" she said, half aloud.

Colonel Enderby, followed by Parker, hurried across from the hotel after Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay to the

gate. As he came up, she turned to him with a courageous smile. Philip could not help admiring her. There was something rather splendid about her, after all.

"Ah! there is the tram. How fortunate! Just at the right moment. Go and stop it, Parker."

Then she paused a moment, and looked steadily at the Colonel.

"You will not go to Spezia by the mid-day train?" she said, as she held out her hand to him.

Something of the honest sorrow and pity he felt for this unhappy woman got into Philip's blue eyes, as he answered—

"No; I remain here. I shall not go to Spezia."

"Thank you. God bless you!" said Eleanor, quickly.

There was a sob in her voice. She put up her hand and drew her veil down over her face, and then made him a charming little gesture of farewell, as she stepped up into the tramcar.

As Philip, revolving many things in his mind, walked slowly back from the gate, Mrs. Murray, stout, high-coloured, sharp-eyed, camp-stool in hand, met him.

"I really am annoyed at having intruded upon you," she said. "Had I known that you were engaged, of course I shouldn't have come. It was stupid of the hotel people not to tell me."

As she spoke, Mrs. Murray subjected Colonel Enderby to a minute and searching scrutiny. "Dear me, how he has improved!" she thought to herself. "And they say he has money. Can he be seriously occupied with that turbulent widow? Now, if Cecilia had only any spirit——" But Cecilia's fond parent

was only too well aware that her daughter had the very smallest possible amount of spirit.

The Colonel was not disposed to be gracious.

"Pray don't apologize," he said stiffly. "Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay was just leaving."

He wanted immensely to get away and be alone; but with Mrs. Murray drawn up so squarely in front of him, it was not quite easy to manage.

"She is a remarkable-looking person," observed that lady, tentatively. "Of course, it is rather a delicate matter to touch upon, but it does seem a pity that she encourages my nephew so much, you know. It has alienated him from the rest of his family in a way we all regret, I can't deny that. Dear Bertie was always such a favourite."

Philip did not reply.

"In a large family like ours such things naturally are talked over, you know, Colonel Enderby. His relations see so little of him now. I have spoken my mind about it more than once. I was determined to come here and see for myself. Cecilia was rather unwilling, but I put it before her as a duty."

"Mrs. Farrell's obedience was always notable, I remember," observed Philip.

Mrs. Murray winced.

"Ah! poor dear Cecilia, how much she has gone through!" she exclaimed piously. "We act for the best. Sometimes I have reproached myself on her account."

Mrs. Murray gently shook her head and closed her eyes, as one whose thoughts lie far too deep for words. But the Colonel made no response; so Mrs. Murray re-opened her eyes after a few seconds, and

returned from her abysmal depth of thought with a sort of jerk.

"I detain you," she said majestically.

"Well, I'm afraid I must go indoors, if you will excuse me," Philip assented. "I have to countermand some orders I gave last night."

The old lady's face became rapidly gracious again.

"You are not going, after all? Delightful!" she exclaimed, with a sharp little show of enthusiasm.

Colonel Enderby felt compelled to answer, though he did not the least enjoy submitting his actions for Mrs. Murray's approval.

"No, not for a few days yet;" and, lifting his hat, he passed into the house.

CHAPTER VII.

THE COLONEL CLASPS HANDS WITH HIS FATE.

ON the eastern side of Genoa, but still within the limits of the city, there is a retired and unfrequented roadway. It offers a soothing contrast alike to the famous streets, with their long *façade* of splendid palaces and their swarming, hurrying, human crowds; and to those tortuous, narrow, melodramatic-looking by-lanes and passages which, with gloomy doorways opening out into dim dusky pavements, and heavily barred windows high up in the melancholy house-walls, form the less fashionable quarters of the brilliant city.—Murderous-looking places these last, where warm, robust, and ancient smells stagnate from year's end to

year's end, and where you almost break your neck in the effort to catch a glimpse of the ribbon of radiant blue sky that palpitates between the contorted lines of the high, repellent house-roofs far above.

On one side, the roadway in question is bounded by a sea-wall, against which the waters of the Mediterranean gurgle and murmur hoarsely some fifteen feet below. On the other side are earthworks, overgrown with weeds and coarse grasses, in which shine the black burnished sides of cannon, their gloomy mouths pointing seaward. Beyond, the ground rises steeply in the picturesque garden of a charming villa, enclosed on the right by a high wall, masked with flowering creepers, and overtopped by the sombre spires of a row of cypresses. Looking westward, you command the vast semicircle of the Port, with its mass of shipping and glittering blue waters, framed in a broad crescent of stately painted houses, that rise up the sloping hillsides towards lustrous gardens and shimmering olive grounds,—guarded above by the purple steps of the Apennines and by a ring of pale ghostly fortifications, outlined keen and clear against the sky.

About four o'clock in the afternoon following his critical conversation with Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay, Philip Enderby sauntered slowly up the roadway, absorbed by a multitude of pressing thoughts. He had come into Genoa on business. He had wandered rather aimlessly through the city, till he found himself landed in this comparatively retired spot.—It seemed a good place to rest in for a while, and try to arrive at conclusions.

Close by, on the left, where the earthworks ended, a quantity of shot was piled, each dark ball of metal

giving off an iridescent dazzle of light as the sunshine touched it. A sentry, with his carbine on his shoulder, paced backwards and forwards, in front of the long, grey, windowless building of a powder-magazine. The man was a fine-looking fellow. His handsome southern face showed dark and ruddy above his blue-grey uniform and under his white linen-covered *képi*; and his white gaiters twinkled in the glaring sunlight as he moved.

The regular tramp of the sentry's feet and his tall, straight figure were very pleasant, somehow, to Colonel Enderby. He leaned back against the broad sea-wall, and proceeded to light a cigar in a leisurely and abstracted manner.

He wanted to be quite calm and judicial-minded, to go through the whole matter from beginning to end.—First, there was his love for Jessie. Philip did not waste much time on that point. In the last twenty-four hours it had become far too vital a part of him to need any questioning or careful scrutiny. Next, there was the question whether, under the circumstances, he was justified in declaring his love to her, in doing his utmost to win the young girl. Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's wild words—some of them Philip tried to forget and put away from him; "The poor thing was half mad," he thought—had revealed to him a horrible and perilous condition of things at the Villa Mortelli. The pity and misery of the situation touched some of the deepest and finest chords in his nature. It was frightful to think of that fair, innocent child and the bitter war of conflicting feeling that was being waged round her all day long; frightful to think

of her habitually breathing an atmosphere poisoned with the fumes of fruitless passion.

Philip thought and thought, weighed his own disabilities against the girl's danger; tried to look on into the future, and seize, by prophetic insight an idea of how things would go—of married life for himself, and for Jessie; of the temptations, difficulties, that might arise and must be guarded against;—tried to get some notion of the whole new untried world of emotion and experience that lay before him;—counted, too, the risk of refusal. The disappointment would be terrible. Last night it seemed painful enough. What would it be if it came some weeks hence, when the sight of the girl's beauty and charm had become a habit and daily necessity?

The sentry paced on in the hot, still sunshine; the beautiful city lay glittering between the purple mountains and purple sea. Philip turned and looked away to the far southern horizon. He felt the critical moment had come—the moment of supreme decision, which would colour, for joy or sorrow, his whole future existence.

There were voices in the garden above; a sound of music from the open windows of the villa; a train of mules clattered by, with a jingling of bells about their fantastic harness; the sea swirled up over the points of rock, and splashed gently against the rough bases of the masonry; and the even tread of the soldier beat out through all the rest with an almost fateful ceaselessness and regularity.

Philip Enderby's whole spirit was shaken with unspoken prayer and strong immutable resolve. He was ready to take all risks. If God would give him the

exquisite gift of this girl's love, he would dedicate himself henceforth to her service; he would keep himself pure and spotless for her sake; he would say no word, harbour no thought, that he need fear to tell her of. By tenderness, by constant care, by absolute devotion, he would make her happy. He would live for her, and her only.—“Ay, and die for her too, if that should seem best,” he added suddenly, half aloud.

Then for a brief interval a great wave of sadness rushed over him, a swift dread of coming pain and disaster; but it passed as suddenly as it had come. And hope—hope of good things, of gracious, tender, and lovely things, ahead there in the coming days—was dominant in Colonel Enderby, as he made his way back through the Genoese streets that evening.

So, contrary perhaps to his better judgment, the Colonel gave way. Cynical persons will smile, and remind us that instances are but rare of successful resistance to a certain class of emotions. Worldly minded persons will complain that there is a savour of crudity and contemptible easiness in our hero's readiness to take a young lady so very obviously thrown at his head. For myself, I venture to hold my own opinions concerning my friend's conduct at this juncture, and to cry after him, as he goes away, filled with the joy of hope and promise,—Good luck to you, true heart! Heaven send you pleasant dreams and no rude awakening.

CHAPTER VIII.

ELEANOR TRIES TO BREAK HER CHAIN.

MEANWHILE, poor Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay had passed a sufficiently wretched day after her excited expedition of the morning. She had lain on her bed, half blinded with nervous headache, tired out, past caring whether her *démarche* had been a wise or a foolish one; only aware of active physical misery, as one long hour dragged by after another through the burning afternoon.

That worthy person, Parker, within whose flat, ungenerous-looking bosom beat a warm and faithful heart, shifted the pillows for her over and over again, and bathed the racked and throbbing head. Parker did not ask to have things explained to her. She entertained an unalterable conviction that the action of some man was at the bottom of every woman's troubles, and, on that basis, was invariably ready to build up a superstructure of practical help and tenderness. This stern hard-featured woman, notwithstanding her unresponsive face and didactic manner, was full of maternal instincts, which were wont to find their outward expression, silently but very soothingly, in the tending of her handsome, over-excitabile mistress.

"You are the most solid comfort I have in life," the latter often said to her. "You are always there to fall back upon, and I cannot get along without some one to fall back upon."

Parker would reply with a sardonic smile. She did not always think her mistress very wise; but, possibly, she cared for her none the less on that account. Even the most devoted of lovers is sensible of a stirring of self-complacency in observing the aberrations of the beloved one's judgment. We must value ourselves above others for something, at times, or our own society would become intolerably tedious even to the most humble-minded of us, I fancy.

Nor had Jessie passed a day very much to her taste either. She had been alone; and to be alone was one of this young lady's severest trials. Mr. Ames had gone out, for him, quite early. She had only seen him at breakfast, when he had said very little, and stared at her once or twice with eyes as objectionably mournful as Malvolio's. Her step-mother had been invisible, and Parker had been invisible too—a fact which Jessie the less regretted, as she seldom found that good woman's society very enlivening. Little Miss Keat was in England. Colonel Enderby was gone.

Jessie wandered about disconsolately. Her trouble was, doubtless, of much the same order as that of a lively kitten, which can find nothing and nobody to play with, and which mews plaintively over the waste of its unemployed energies. Still, though the kitten's sense of discomfort may appear as a very trivial matter to some earnest soul toiling strenuously after a great and universal good, it is sufficiently trying and absorbing to the kitten itself, I imagine; the very limitations of its nature, which cause its discomforts to appear of so slight moment to the afore-mentioned earnest soul, necessarily making its small griefs the

more urgent and the harder for the little creature to bear. We are too apt to forget that, though the troubles of deep and of shallow natures differ widely in kind, they do not differ, after all, very sensibly in degree. A tiny brook may be full to overflowing, as well as the mighty river that submerges a quarter of a continent.

Quite late that evening Eleanor came slowly downstairs. Her room had become unbearable. She threw a thin white woollen shawl about her head and shoulders, and, going out on to the terrace, sat down on the seat against the trellised arbour. The semi-darkness and cool, fragrant air of the night were grateful to her after those weary hours of feverish pain. She sat still, in a condition of mental vacuity, sensible only that she was physically less wretched than she had been, and that that in itself was an immeasurable boon.

At last the stillness was broken by the sound of a man's footsteps coming up the carriage drive. There was something light and yet leisurely in the tread which Eleanor immediately recognized. She remained perfectly quiet, hoping that Mr. Ames might go into the house without perceiving her presence. She dreaded meeting him after her late confession to Philip Enderby. She almost held her breath, and pressed herself back among the overhanging foliage of the arbour. She felt very weak and languid, wholly unfit for sustaining a part in a dialogue of an intimate and possibly painful character.

Bertie Ames paused for a moment. His eye had been caught by the faint, luminous glimmer of his

cousin's white shawl. He came straight along the terrace, and stood a few paces from her.

"Is that you, Eleanor?" he inquired.

"Yes," she answered reluctantly.

It was too dark for either to see the other. Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay shifted her position slightly and sighed. She was frightened somehow. Presently Bertie spoke again.

"Colonel Enderby has not gone yet, I find. I had the privilege of seeing him for a few minutes this evening. I am not conceited enough to suppose that he wishes to pick a quarrel with me—I am not sufficiently important for that; but I must say his manner was hardly what I should define as conciliatory."

The young man waited after he had spoken. His silence seemed to compel an answer.

"I knew already that Colonel Enderby had decided to stay on a little longer," said Eleanor.

"So I supposed," observed Mr. Ames.

There was another silence.

"Bertie," Eleanor said at last, with a certain tremor in her voice, "would you mind very much going away for a week or so?"

"Thanks, cousin Nell," he replied. "I quite appreciate the excellence of your intentions in making that proposal. But I don't think I quite see my way to leaving Terzia just now. There is my dear aunt, Mrs. Murray, for one thing, who has come here fired with all manner of philanthropic zeal to save me from dire dangers—so she intimates, at least. Then, you know, I don't much care about travelling without Antonio. I am horribly lazy about packing and so

on, and I can't very well deprive you of your cook at a few hours' notice."

"I thought it would perhaps be better for every one," she said humbly. "I thought it might spare some pain."

Bertie laughed a little.

"Oh," he returned, with all possible sweetness, "as to that, we decided on the victim last night, Eleanor. Pray don't vex yourself about me. I assure you, I shall be quite interested in testing my powers of endurance. I have an enthusiasm for self-torture worthy of an Indian fakir just at the present moment."

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay had risen hastily while he was speaking, and walked towards the house. In the doorway she turned round. The light from within fell on the young man's slim figure. She surveyed him critically from top to toe; there was a spice of contempt in the expression of her fine eyes.

"Yes, you are strikingly like an Indian fakir," she said. "You dress admirably for the part. There is a touch of exquisite realism, for instance, in that tuberose. You are like the fakir in this too—that you appear supremely indifferent to the fact that your experiments in self-torture may present an intensely disagreeable spectacle to other people."

Bertie Ames raised his eyebrows.

"Really," he said, "this demonstration appears to me a little uncalled for. You have got your own way in all essentials—as I predicted—won't that suffice?"

Then he took off his hat and gloves with much

serenity and composure, and followed his cousin in a leisurely manner across the large flagged hall.

He found her with her head thrown back, leaning against the wall just at the foot of the staircase.

"Good heavens! Nell, what is the matter? You look as white as a sheet!" he cried.

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's lips were tremulous; she had a difficulty in speaking.

"It is very absurd, but I feel as if I couldn't get upstairs alone. I'm very sorry to trouble you, Bertie, but I am afraid I must ask you to go and call Parker for me."

Really it seemed a great pity that Mr. Ames had muddled his matrimonial prospects so hopelessly, for in many ways he would have made an admirable husband. He had all the instincts of a first-rate nurse; he was observant, endlessly patient, delightfully handy, and as quickly affected by the sight of physical suffering as the most soft-hearted of women.

"I can help you ten times better than Parker," he answered. "Here, let me come this side of you. Now take hold of the banisters with your other hand. Don't tumble over your gown. There!"

As he spoke he put his left arm firmly round Eleanor's waist, and carried rather than led her upstairs.

Half-way she paused to rest for a minute; she was faint and dizzy, and miserably weak. Whether she would or no, she leaned nearly her whole weight on the young man's encircling arm.

"Don't let us quarrel, Nell," he said, in a low voice. "We have never done that yet, you know. It

would not be quite like us; it would give occasion to the enemy to blaspheme. Several people would look wise and say they had always foretold it, and rejoice with evil rejoicing if you and I were known to have fallen out. I am afraid I said some detestable things last night, but I believe I was in a condition of temporary insanity. A quarrel with you would be quite the most distressing thing that could befall me—now.”

He emphasized the last word gently.

Eleanor fully realized the significance of that gentle emphasis. Still, his words had comfort in them of a kind; and she was in almost abject need of comfort at the moment.

“I am ready to go on, Bertie,” she answered, very simply; “but I am so knocked up that if I talk I’m afraid I shall begin to cry.”

At the stair-head Parker met them.

“I told you you weren’t fit to go out, ma’am,” she remarked, with some severity.

Even the kindest persons derive a certain pleasure from the fulfilment of their own dismal prophecies. It may be questioned whether Jeremiah would not have presented a much more lamentable figure to his contemporaries even than he did, if all his heart-breaking prognostications regarding coming captivity had proved, in the end, illusory.

Parker glanced at Mr. Ames with considerable dislike and suspicion.

“Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay is not going to sit up and talk to-night, sir,” she said, with a sort of snap.

“Certainly not, my dear Mrs. Parker,” replied that gentleman, with his most assuaging smile. “My cousin

seems really ill. I have been out all day, you know, and I can't conceive what you have been doing to her meanwhile."

Parker sniffed. It was her way of expressing unlimited scorn and withering contempt for the frauds, prevarications, manners, morals, and general intelligence of the male sex.

CHAPTER IX.

"PEU DE GENS SAVENT ÊTRE VIEUX."

It is, perhaps, hardly necessary to state that Philip Enderby found Jessie more captivating than ever on his return to the little red villa. He had acquired, for a time at least, the right to think about her, to look at her, to admire her unrestrainedly. He had the right to let himself go—and, as most of us know, that sort of going is one of the very pleasantest sensations in the world. Then, Jessie was so frankly glad that he had returned, and she manifested the gladness after such a simple, radiant, dainty sort of fashion. She was, indeed, inimitably bright and fresh.

I fear that in speaking of this young lady I reiterate the above adjectives to the point of tediousness, and yet I cannot very well avoid it. Of some people it is enough to cover, or try to cover, the effect they produce on the mind of the spectator once and for all. It is not necessary to insist on the definition because there is a certain stability in the subject of it. But in the case of such persons as Jessie, and they are rare enough, the charm of whose charm consists

in the fact that it is always new, always appealing with another touch of delicate originality, always shifting and changing, with a thousand fleeting lights and shadows—because there is an ephemeral quality about it, constant only in bewitching inconstancy—one is driven over and over again to note the sense of novelty, of refined surprise and quickened observation, that it produces upon the onlooker. Jessie, when pleased and desirous of pleasing, was undoubtedly a being created to be fallen in love with. Yes, notwithstanding his momentary misgivings and forecastings of possible tribulation, the Colonel was in an enviable situation at this moment. It would seem ridiculously superfluous to expend any of one's available stock of sympathy on him.

Mrs. Murray, though not exhibiting all the virtues supposed to be appropriate to the period of old age in their most patent and engaging form, is really a far more pathetic figure, to my thinking, than Philip Enderby, with his fine dash of heroism and poetic instinct.

She was not a nice old woman; and that in itself, rightly considered, is a terribly distressing thing. High-minded, pure-hearted persons need not be so very much commiserated after all, even if hard times do come to them now and again. They are secure of their reward somewhere—though not possibly in this present state of being—and that it will be a full and sufficient one we need not doubt. But as for narrow, shrewd, worldly souls, who have applied themselves diligently to scraping up all possible satisfactions off the surface of life, who are hopelessly rooted in the material order of things, whose hands are soiled with

continual and eager grasping at vulgar transitory advantages,—these souls will doubtless have their reward too. But, good heavens! what a windy, stomach-achy sort of reward it promises to be! We will shed tears, bitter, yet proud, over our heroes, if you will; but, in pity's name, let us keep a few honest drops for the horrible disappointments of these poor, empty, starving wretches.

Mrs. Murray had, for many years, sedulously set herself to make a friend of the Mammon of Unrighteousness. But so far, I suppose, she had not been very successful in conciliating that popular deity, since she was still knocking about the world on a limited income, with no visible prospect of a speedy reception into everlasting or well-appointed habitations. She put an inordinate value on wealth, on social position, on the printing of names even in the second part of Dod's ten-and-sixpenny peerage. It seemed to her a very crown of blessing that people should have occasion to say of one: "Ah, dear Mrs. So-and-so, she was one of the Dashes, don't you know, and her mother was an Asterisk." Cecilia's marriage had been a very ripe and full-bodied glorification to her, because it introduced a sprig of nobility into the family. But now that poor Eugene had been gathered to his fathers, leaving his widow little enough beyond his debts, and that precious prefix to her name, Mrs. Murray began to think it was about time to look out for something solid in the way of yearly income. Cecilia, it was true, was sadly wanting in spirit: yet, as Mrs. Murray closed her thin red lips over her surprisingly white and even teeth, she flattered herself that very possibly she still had spirit enough for two.

From the moment she met Colonel Enderby on that critical Sunday evening she had planned a campaign. The check which she received from the news of his intended departure only served to stimulate her activity: we are all a trifle disposed to over-value the worth of a vanishing good. Now that she learnt he really proposed to stay on, the dear old lady set herself gallantly in battle array, beat the warlike drum, and played the inspiring fife in poor Cecilia's meek ears. Not loudly and openly, of course; but with innumerable hints, suggestions, touching reminiscences of early loves, and well-marshalled fears for poor darling little Johnnie, left, alas! so early without the healthy moral and social influences of a father's presence. All is fair, says the proverb, in love and in war; what, then, can possibly be unfair where love and war so obviously go along hand-in-hand?

"Johnnie is a high-spirited child, Cecilia," she said on one occasion, when, the high-spirited child having at last been consigned to his bed, the two ladies were spending the evening together in their little *salon*.

"Yes; I am always very thankful for it," answered Mrs. Farrell. "I think it shows he is healthy."

Mrs. Murray stuck her white bone needle into her strip of crochet, crossed her hands on what had formerly been her waist, and prepared for action. She was taking her ease in her inn, arrayed in a purple-and-black striped dressing-gown, and large, easy, red slippers. She had slumbered, too, a little after dinner—a habit that grows upon even the most vigilant of us with age—and her white lace cap had fetched way during the sweet abandonment of sleep, and inclined to the left in a somewhat lax and ill-regulated manner.

But what did that matter? Even in undress uniform, Mrs. Murray felt equal to attacking and successfully routing her daughter.

"Of course, you can look at it in that way, Cecilia, if you like," she said sternly. "But it seems to me a great pity you should be so infatuated about the poor child; it can't be for his good. And it often obliges me to put things before you, and say things which I'd far rather not."

"Is anything the matter? Has Johnnie done wrong?" hastily inquired Mrs. Farrell.

"Ah! that's just like you, Cecilia—flaring up in a moment, before one has time to explain one's self. It is impossible ever to talk over anything quietly with you."

Mrs. Murray picked up her crochet and worked diligently for a minute or two. She knew her daughter as completely as a violinist knows his instrument. She had played on this poor human instrument often enough, and was accurately aware how to produce the effects she required.

Mrs. Farrell moved across and closed the door of communication between the *salon* and her bedroom. As she did so she paused for a few seconds to listen to the even breathing of her child.

"We might wake him," she observed parenthetically.

The elder lady worked on in silence.

"If you have anything to complain of in Johnnie's conduct, I should be so glad if you would tell me," resumed Mrs. Farrell. "I know how interested you are in him; I always value your advice."

"Nineteen, twenty, twenty-one," counted Mrs. Murray.

"Yes; twenty—let me see—twenty—twenty-two. So you say, Cecilia; but, at the same time, I observe you generally resent my advice pretty hotly when I offer it to you. Twenty-three—twenty-four. Pray don't speak loud, my love; remember how wretchedly thin these foreign walls are."

Mrs. Farrell sat down wearily by the table. She was too much accustomed to sweeping accusations to resent them actively; but the anxious, harassed expression developed itself very sensibly in her worn and faded countenance.

"Twenty-eight," murmured Mrs. Murray. "You spoil Johnnie, and it makes me dreadfully nervous at times—nervous for you both. You have no head, you know, Cecilia; you never look forward. You merely think of gratifying the child in the passing moment. Ah! if poor Eugene had only been spared it would have been a great mercy for that boy!"

Cecilia bent down and plucked the little bits of fluff and dust off the tablecloth with trembling fingers.

"You used to say Eugene wouldn't make a good father," she said slowly, in a low voice.

"No, no, Cecilia; there you are entirely wrong," cried Mrs. Murray, with amazing energy. "You really have the most defective memory. I certainly never said that. It would have been the most unwarrantable thing to say; and I hope—I do hope—that I always weigh my words. I, at all events, recognized poor Eugene's good qualities. He was very fond of children—Eugene was very affectionate. A man is, almost invariably, more thoughtful for his child than for himself. I repeat, Eugene would have been the greatest blessing to that unfortunate boy."

Mrs. Murray picked up her crochet again.

"Thirty-one, thirty-two," she murmured, with dignity.

Upon my word, at times one is tempted to think these forbearing, long-suffering, humble-minded individuals will have a great deal to answer for some day. They give so much opportunity for sinning on the part of others. Whether the interests of public morality are, in any degree, served by this turning of the other cheek to the smiter is a question which will present itself to one now and again. It would have been far wholesomer for Mrs. Murray, surely, if her daughter had told her roundly that she was nothing better than an insolent old tyrant, and had then left her to digest in solitude that pungent truth. But Cecilia Farrell did nothing of the kind. She knew more was coming, and, with the patience of a Griselda, she waited for it.

"Johnnie wants a man," said Mrs. Murray, after a while, in an oracular tone. "He needs a stronger hand than yours, Cecilia. I do my best; but then, who will listen to the advice of a poor, broken-down old woman like me?"

Mrs. Murray sighed and choked a little.

"I am sure, mother, I always try to do what you wish," murmured Cecilia, humbly.

"The Farrells are wild, all very wild," continued the old lady. "Johnnie takes after his father's family. He will give you a lot of trouble yet, my dear, and you're not equal to it. I am resolved to devote myself to you as long as I live. Whatever it costs me, I will never leave you. But who can tell? I am an old woman; I may be called away at a moment's notice, and then——"

Mrs. Farrell was quite moved. She got up, went to her mother's side, and bent down over her.

"You don't feel ill?" she said.

"Bless me! no, not in the least. Why do you ask, Cecilia, in that sudden sort of way? I'm not a bad colour, am I? You don't see anything odd about my eyes?"

Being ill was the thing of all others she dreaded. Sudden death is useful to hoist up as a bogey for dramatic purposes: but at the slightest signs of approaching indisposition, the lady would have sent off post-haste for the nearest doctor. She recovered her composure, however, pretty promptly.

"I'm not ill now, but I may be any day. I lie awake at night, thinking of you and poor Johnnie. Ah! well——"

"Dear mother," said Mrs. Farrell, softly.

"Eugene was not a good husband to you, Cecilia." She glanced up at her daughter quickly. "Perhaps I once did you an injury; I have tried to repair it. I say to everybody, 'Cecilia and I are one; I will never leave her.' But seeing Colonel Enderby again has reminded me of many things."

Mrs. Farrell coloured. She stood awkwardly, in an uncertain lopsided way, by her mother's chair. "Cecilia's carriage always was wretchedly poor," thought Mrs. Murray.

"We won't talk of that, please"—Mrs. Farrell spoke with a trace of hesitation—"It was all over long ago."

"I am not so sure of that. You know I never push myself, Cecilia. I never ask for your confidence unless you offer it to me. I am very tenacious of appearing at all officious. I hope I am always delicate

in these intimate matters. But I am not blind, you know; and I'm not at all so very sure that it was all over long ago."

Mrs. Murray closed her eyes and nodded her head emphatically, thereby causing her cap to lurch over a little further in the direction of her left ear.

"It seems to me that our meeting with Colonel Enderby was absolutely providential."

Then she applied herself diligently to counting her crochet again.

"I don't think I quite understand you, mother," remarked Cecilia, mildly, after a few moments' pause.

Mrs. Murray cleared her throat with a rasping noise. With all her devotion to her daughter's welfare, she was sorely tempted to box her ears soundly at times. However, she managed to dominate the liveliness of her irritation.

"You are too modest, Cecilia; you always under-value yourself. Colonel Enderby was going. He met you in the garden next morning, and immediately decided to stay."

"Oh, it had nothing to do with me. He told me that he was going. It was after Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's visit he changed his mind."

Mrs. Murray looked up sharply.

"Ah!" she said. She had received a check. "Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay is a bold, scheming woman," she broke out. "I haven't any too great opinion of her character. Colonel Enderby ought to be warned."

"Mother, do you think you had better interfere?" asked Mrs. Farrell, in a frightened voice.

"Four, five, six—slip one. How you do catch one up, Cecilia! Did I ever say I should interfere? But

if a person of my age, and with my experience, may not sometimes try to keep a fellow-creature from making mistakes, it is hard. Poor Philip Enderby! Men never see through this sort of woman.—Ah, what a husband and father he would be! If I could see you married to Philip Enderby, I should, yes, I should—and poor little Johnnie too—I should die happy.”

The excellent lady had become almost inarticulate. Her voice was broken; and two small tears essayed to make their downward way over the powdered surface of her cheeks. But they possessed no very large share of vitality, those two tears. They became confused amid an intricate system of but ill-concealed wrinkles, and, in fine, they never fell.

Cecilia was quite overcome by this exhibition of feeling. Still, her natural rectitude made her reply in a manner hardly calculated to soothe or satisfy her companion.

“Please don’t be distressed, mother,” she said; “but all that is quite out of the question.”

She turned away. She was humble-minded enough, and to spare; yet there are certain admissions which no woman can make without a stab of pain, amounting to absolute anguish.

“You are too kind to see it; but I am old and plain now. No man will ever think of me in that way again.”

Mrs. Murray rose.

“You are talking like a silly, sentimental school-girl of seventeen, instead of like a reasonable being of over forty. You know just as well as I do that a woman must meet a man half-way. Of course, if she stands up against the wall, and waits till he comes all

of his own accord to ask her, she may stand up against the wall for ever. Love at first sight may be taught in boarding-schools, to keep little girls out of mischief; but it isn't taught anywhere else in the world as I know. Fiddle-de-dee!" cried Mrs. Murray, snapping her fingers fiercely; "do try to exercise a little common sense, instead of maundering about your age and your looks. You must make the best of yourself; you must be pleasant and seem anxious to please; you must flatter—delicately, of course; but still do it. They're all open to that. At bottom every man's as vain as a peacock. There are a hundred little things a woman can do. Well, then, do them. We must help ourselves, I tell you. You must come forward. A man at Colonel Enderby's age likes a woman who isn't too young. She is less flighty, she gives less trouble. Then, he has never married, so, of course, he has gone on caring for you. You have only got to play your cards well.—Yes, it is really providential," she added devoutly. "You must take more care of your dress—it's slovenly; and buy some prettier boots in Genoa, with heels to them. And think of poor little Johnnie's future!"

Ah! what an inspiring and consolatory doctrine is that of the survival of the fittest. How agreeably it strengthens the hands of the capable, merciless strong, and causes the gentle and timid weak to duck under. How beautifully it is calculated to increase the exercise of the more robust virtues—pride, arrogance, cruelty, and such like. And what a very triumph of paradox, that eighteen centuries of Christianity should have evolved this gospel for us! However, fortunately, as you please, there lingers a leaven in human nature

which prevents, as yet, its receiving this gospel in all its fulness. And those foolish persons—I count myself gladly among them—who have but a limited admiration for proud looks and high stomachs, will still cherish a hope of the survival of an unfit minority, among whom it may remain possible to cultivate gentleness, modesty, and a quiet love of personal liberty, without being immediately trampled underfoot.

But this is a digression: and a digression—in the estimation of persons living under the present system of express trains and postal telegrams, persons who have also, in the matter of amusement, a comprehensive habit of getting through as much in a week as would have lasted their fore-fathers a good twelve-month—has a perilous affinity to the unpardonable sin. One trusts that here and there, in remote country districts, there may still be left a few kindly unenergetic folk, who cut out their lives by an older, more leisurely and stately pattern; and who, instead of for ever calling out impatiently to a writer to stick to his text, are willing enough to wander down byways of thought, in comfortable, meditative fashion.

For myself, being naturally of an indolent and vagrant habit, I find it extremely difficult always to sit bolt upright on the coach-box and send my team at a spanking pace along the dusty high-road of my history, with an accurate remembrance of the stage just ahead, where I have to change horses, and set down or pick up another passenger. I have a weak, unworthy craving after rickety donkey-carts and deep, high-banked country lanes, full of brambles and cam-pion and calamint, that lead nowhere in particular: of old rut-tracks, across waste heaths and broad furze-

dotted commons—dear, unfruitful places, with wide, still views of a monotonous and unhistoric description. And so, I pray kind heaven, that here and there I may have the good luck to meet with a reader of the old school, who will be ready enough to get down off the box-seat too, and, bestowing himself graciously in some humbler vehicle, dawdle with me a little by the way.

If a book tells a true story it can hardly fail to end but drearily. Why, then, should we hurry on so feverishly towards a foregone conclusion? Colonel Enderby is happy enough making love, after his quiet, reverent manner, at this moment; and bright-eyed, smiling Jessie is happy enough in receiving his homage. And if the other members of the company are rather on tenter-hooks meanwhile, I protest I don't care a rap. They were all pretty much the authors of their own discomforts, as far as I can see; and may, therefore, very justly suffer a little longer, while I take a stroll for a while and rest my wrists, which get tired and stiff enough with such long handling of the whip and the ribbons.

CHAPTER X.

MRS. MURRAY DECIDES TO PUT DOWN HER FOOT.

MRS. MURRAY, as the pleasant spring days slipped by, became increasingly convinced that it was her bounden duty to open Philip Enderby's eyes to what she was pleased to denote as—Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's true character.

Like many persons whom it would be harsh to designate by the ill-sounding name of liar, Mrs. Murray had a very much more vivid sense of the importance of her own ends, than of the importance of strict veracity. The truth is big enough, after all, to take care of itself. What we poor mortals have to do is to take care ourselves. The fittest survive, no doubt—in the end the battle is to the strong; but even they have a pretty hard fight of it at times, and must struggle with a certain violence of determination for existence.

Perhaps Mrs. Murray underrated the strength of the enemy. That was excusable enough; many renowned commanders, both in ancient and modern history, have done the same. She had regarded Philip with a species of contempt, when, as a somewhat raw and inexperienced youth, he had first wooed Cecilia. Mrs. Murray was shrewd up to a certain point; beyond that point her cunning failed her; she was liable to fall into errors of judgment, and over-reach herself. It has been said that Satan himself is short sighted. Not

for an instant is it desired to imply a resemblance between a respectable old English lady of very fair social standing and the Prince of Darkness. Still, one may venture to admit the probability of a limitation in the acuteness of the supreme power of evil, since one recognizes such distinct limits in the case of those human beings who may be described as—not quite nice. Mrs. Murray could not shake off the impression that the Colonel was more or less of a silly fish. He was in these days, no doubt, a fish extremely well worth angling for; but she fancied he would rise to an artificial fly of very common make. So the lady did not worry herself about refined arts and ingenious concealments of purpose. She waylaid Colonel Enderby at all available corners in the hotel; she planted her camp-stool solidly in front of him at all chance meetings out of doors. She praised her daughter; she mourned over her grandson; she bewailed that congenital tendency towards wildness on the part of the Farrells; she alluded touchingly to the past; she even went so far as to hint at a burdened conscience, and at a laudable desire for reparation.

"The man must be a fool or a flint if he doesn't give way," Mrs. Murray said to herself more than once; and the man, being neither fool nor flint, did give way in a degree. He was filled with a sincere commiseration for Mrs. Farrell, founded on an immense disgust for her mother.

The Colonel rarely permitted himself to say hard things, especially of a woman; but when, one morning, in the privacy of his own room, he found himself referring to Mrs. Murray as "an abominable, painted old harridan," his conscience did not accuse him of having

committed a grave impropriety. In point of fact, he repeated the opprobrious epithet more than once, and found himself sensibly the better for so doing.

Still, Mrs. Murray could not flatter herself that her success was in proportion either to her wishes or her efforts. She saw so little of Colonel Enderby, after all. He was always up at the Villa Mortelli. One day she reached the point of exasperation: she decided to follow him up to the red villa, and fairly carry the war into the enemy's country.

The day in question was hot to the point of breathlessness. In the vain hope of getting a little air from the sea, the whole party sat out on the *loggia*, under a great red-and-drab striped awning, stretched from the house-wall above the window of the drawing-room; and forming a pretty effective shelter from the rays of the afternoon sun. The land and sea reeled and danced in the palpitating heat mist.

Perhaps it was the heat, perhaps there was an intuitive sense of crossing intentions and desires among the little group of people assembled on the *loggia*; certainly the conversation had an inclination to run on dangerous topics. Eleanor was a trifle too vivid; Bertie a trifle too cynical; Cecilia Farrell even abnormally limp and harassed; Mrs. Murray distinctly acid under a fine assumption of geniality; the Colonel somewhat over-stiff and dignified.

Jessie, who at times appeared to possess a keenness of perception, hardly human, of coming storms, whether spiritual or physical, moved about restlessly. She had been arranging several great jars of flowers standing on a table within the open window of the drawing-room. Her charming figure had shown to

great advantage as she stretched up to set the graceful flowering boughs in their place, and moved back a step or two to judge the general effect of her handiwork. Philip Enderby had sat and watched her. He found it a remarkably interesting occupation. Now she rested, just opposite to him, on the arm of one of the chairs on the *loggia*, idly twisting the sprigs of leaf and blossom that remained over into a dainty little wreath. Philip still watched her. Her small white hands, with their round, rosy finger-tips, were wonderfully pretty as she sorted and arranged the flowers.

"My dear Bertie," Mrs. Murray was saying with an air which strove to be absolutely disengaged, "you are an authority in hotels and everything domestic. I want you to give darling Cecilia and me the benefit of your experience."

"I have never looked on hotels as exactly domestic institutions," returned Mr. Ames, in his soft rich voice. "But my experience is at everybody's service. It is briefly comprehended in one phrase—all hotels are more or less beastly, and all hotel-keepers are more or less swindlers. Does that help you much, dear aunt?"

Mrs. Murray indulged in a sharp-edged smile.

"You advise an apartment, then?" she said.

Colonel Enderby leant a little forward towards the girl.

"Who are you making that for?" he asked her.

She raised her eyes to his face with her usual bright, unshrinking gaze.

"Who? Oh, nobody, anybody—Bertie, Malvolio, you, if you like. I was really making it to please my-

self. I like to touch fresh leaves and flowers; they feel so nice. There, see!" and she laid the half-finished garland in his hand.

"I never advise anything," said Bertie Ames, with rather an unnecessary drawl. He stretched himself out lazily in his long cane chair, and repressed a yawn elaborately. "I always recommend people to do exactly what they want to do. Advice is a superfluity. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred people don't take it. The hundredth they do take it, with a reservation: then, of course, it turns out badly, and they think you an idiot, and never forgive you."

Mr. Ames looked fixedly at Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay as he spoke. She bent over a large piece of canvas, on which she was working a florid pattern in wools. That piece of canvas had become an institution; it had reappeared at intervals for some years, much to Jessie's irritation. Eleanor possessed but a limited capacity for small industries: her stitches had a curious habit of being crossed alternate ways, and at all conceivable angles. To Jessie, whose quick, concrete mind seized immediately on the right way of doing a thing, and whose deft fingers seemed incapable of an awkwardness, this bungling over needlework on the part of her step-mother was an incomprehensible stupidity.

As Mr. Ames spoke, Eleanor glanced up at him. Her forehead was contracted into a frown; but whether from a struggle to fathom the mysteries of cross-stitch or from some deeper anxiety, one could hardly pronounce.

"I don't think you're quite well, Bertie," she said suddenly. "Have you got neuralgia again?"

Mrs. Murray looked sharply from one of the speakers to the other. She had walked up from the tramcar, and it had been exceedingly warm. In proportion as elderly ladies patronize rouge and rice-powder, they should eschew physical exertion. Mrs. Murray's small eyes twinkled unpleasantly above her large, mottled cheeks.

"When I was a girl," she remarked, "young men of your age never complained of neuralgia."

"Probably not," Bertie answered slowly. "But, you see, when the members of the medical profession had stamped out all the fevers and small-pox, and so on, which persons of quality patronized in your youth, dear aunt, they then observed a probability of their speedily running short of patients altogether. So they immediately set to work, and discovered a number of nervous diseases—nice convenient things, which torture the surface of you, so to speak, and don't get near anything so vulgar as killing. Demand creates supply, and the power of faith is unlimited. As soon as we idle people were assured of the existence of nerves, we began to suffer from them. Nature has an endless power of adjusting herself. All things work together for good, as Colonel Enderby would put it.—In this case, it was mainly for the good of the doctors, certainly. Do you follow me, dear aunt?"

Eleanor changed her position impatiently, with a kind of richly annoyed rustle.

"I really believe it would be cooler indoors," she said. "Jessie, will you go and play to us?"

The girl gathered up her flowers reluctantly.

"My neuralgia is of rather a peculiar kind," Bertie Ames went on calmly, turning to Philip Enderby, and

addressing him with most disarming suavity. "It has proved baffling to many skilled physicians. I continue to suffer frightfully at times. My cousin really understands the case better than any one else, I believe. She is great on medical matters, you know; she studied them in connection with a scheme for reforming the unsanitary condition of many Turkish houses. She subscribed to an excellent little society—I wonder if you've any of the reports by you, Nell? they were delightful reading—a little society for sending out English ladies of middle age and unimpeachable morals to overhaul the harems. It was an understanding—I may mention, by the way—that the ladies selected should be distinctly plain. Altogether it was a remarkably interesting scheme. But somehow the Moslem husbands and fathers did not quite seem to see it. They——"

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay got up hastily.

"Bertie, you are absurd; you are intolerable!" she cried.

"Am I?" he inquired blandly. "I am so sorry. I was under the impression that I was agreeable. The conversation seemed to languish. I was merely doing my humble best to entertain your guests."

He rose slowly as he spoke.

"Shall I bring the sacred carpet indoors?" he added, pointing to Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's somewhat colossal piece of needlework.

"Do as you like," she answered, with a touch of temper.

"I was just going to tell you, Colonel Enderby," Bertie resumed, with much composure, "when my cousin interrupted me, about my neuralgia. My cousin

has been good enough to interest herself very much in the subject. We have talked it over a number of times—our quiet life here stimulates egotism, you know; it tempts one to be a little personal. We have arrived at the conclusion that the case is rather serious; that, in short, I suffer from neuralgia of the heart. It is a dangerous affection; it has been known, at times, partially to obscure the reason."

Colonel Enderby was standing up too. He looked full in the young man's handsome, brown eyes, as he answered—

"Upon my word, then, I should do my best to find a cure at once, if I were you. A man's life mayn't be worth very much; but as long as he does live, there can be no question as to the advantage of his keeping his reason."

"True," murmured Mr. Ames, with a slight lifting of the eyebrows. "Quite true, though just a shade brutal, perhaps, in the statement of it.—Yet, in some ways, it is singularly interesting to hear you say that. Now, Jessie, like a delightful little person, leave off weaving memorial garlands for me, or Malvolio, or Colonel Enderby, if he likes them—that was the phrase, I think?—and go and play to us. It appears to me we all require soothing."

Jessie turned from him with a slightly petulant gesture. Then she looked round at the rest of the company.

"You are really coming in?" she asked. "I don't like being alone. I play much better if I know people are listening."

"I am invariably ready to come and listen, Jessie," said Bertie, mildly.

"You are all very well," the girl answered, looking down and fingering her little wreath; "but you are not quite enough, Bertie, to be inspiring by yourself, you know."

"Oh, we'll all come!" cried Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay hastily. She moved a step or two aside with a sweep of full crisp skirts, and, turning to Mrs. Farrell, smiled and motioned her to pass in first at the open window.

Mrs. Murray essayed to rise; but her chair was low, and she was not always very agile in these days.

"Can I help you, mother?" asked Cecilia, coming towards her.

Mrs. Murray paused a moment before replying, then she said,—

"No, my dear; I think, on the whole, I'll remain where I am. You will excuse my not coming in with you?"

"Oh, most certainly! Pray don't move," responded Eleanor, with considerable alacrity.

"Colonel Enderby, you'll stay with me now, won't you?" Mrs. Murray went on. "I have not seen you these two days past, for more than a minute at a time. And there is nothing, if I may say so, which I enjoy more than a quiet chat with you. As one grows old, you know, one does so value good conversation. I have said to Cecilia more than once, 'Now, Colonel Enderby talks really well: none of that light, scrappy, senseless talk one hears so much of now; but real good conversation.' It reminds me of the sort of thing I was accustomed to years ago, in poor Mr. Murray's lifetime. We lived very much in political society then, you know. Ah, one so seldom meets a good talker nowadays!"

However admirable his speech might be, Philip could also command a convenient power of silence, when it suited him to do so. He bowed a speechless acknowledgment of his companion's polite observations. Her mature, not to say over-ripe, blandishments were eminently distasteful to him—all the more so just now, as he saw Mr. Ames within, in very close proximity to Jessie, opening the piano for her. Yet he could hardly desert Mrs. Murray after her late address. Philip's code of good manners demanded certain sacrifices of him; and he made them, as a rule, without flinching.

"I often think," said Mrs. Murray, in a low, confidential tone, shutting her eyes, raising her right hand, and then dropping it again with a little flop on her lap—"Yes, I often think to myself, Colonel Enderby, Ah! what a difference, when I see my own dear Cecilia and our hostess side by side! I observe people a great deal, you know. At my age what is there left for one to do but to observe, and strive to help a little now and then?"

Philip acquiesced silently again. What on earth could he say? The difference was sufficiently marked, and not the most courteous-minded of men could pretend it was very sensibly in poor Mrs. Farrell's favour.

"I know what every one would say," Mrs. Murray continued, with an air of remarkable candour. "Maternal prejudice, and all that sort of thing, you know, when I talk in this way. But I look below the surface, my dear Colonel; and the difference between those two women in heart, in temper, in feeling, in real devotion, is greater than any merely external differences."

Meanwhile, Jessie had begun playing. The girl

usually selected somewhat dramatic and emotional music. Her taste was not by any means regulated, either in her choice of pieces or manner of rendering them, by the ordinary English-schoolroom standard. There was a dash of something audacious and professional in her style of playing, which had been known, before now, to excite not only surprise but alarm in the breasts of her auditors. Certain worthy ladies, for instance, who consecrated their superfluous energies to the cause of the German Jews, were little short of scandalized by Jessie's musical performances; and had left her step-mother's *appartement* in Florence, on more than one occasion, with their ears tingling, and an uncomfortable feeling that they had been assisting at something little short of an indecent orgy in the way of sound. I am not prepared to maintain that even Philip himself was not startled, at moments, by the unmistakable passion which this slender, dainty, innocent-eyed maiden contrived to throw into her playing. If he had heard any other girl play in that same broad, fearless fashion, he would have been disposed to call it the least bit unfeminine; but the Colonel's critical faculties were obscured where this individual girl was concerned. Jessie stood alone in his mind, and could no longer be subjected to the careful measuring meted out to other mortals. There is a love—a dear, old-fashioned, simple love, rarely enough found now, I fear, which swallowed the beloved object whole, so to speak—which ignored blemishes, overlooked defects, refused to admit the most patent of facts, if they threatened to detract in ever so slight a degree from the absolute perfection of the loved one. Philip's

love was of this order—call it foolish, if you will, it is also, perhaps, very sadly beautiful.

Just as Mrs. Murray concluded her speech concerning the desirability of remembering that fair without is sometimes foul within, Jessie stopped playing abruptly. The air still vibrated with the storm of sound that had gone before. She turned and glanced round the room.

“Where is Colonel Enderby?” she asked, in her clear tones. “Didn’t he come in?”

“He preferred the *loggia* and my dear aunt’s society.”

It was Bertie Ames who answered. Jessie opened her blue-grey eyes very wide.

Then, seeing Philip standing outside—“Colonel Enderby, do you really prefer it?” she cried, looking at him and smiling.

The rapidity with which Mrs. Murray heaved herself up out of her low basket chair, and interposed her voluminous person between Philip and the open window, was positively astounding.

“Go on, go on, dear girl. We hear you charmingly out here. Delightful music; don’t stop, pray,” she said, waving her hand in an encouraging, yet imperative manner.

Bertie Ames laughed to himself. He leaned down above the girl’s fair head and whispered—“When you are as old as my aunt, Mrs. Murray, will you know how to get your own way as well as she does?”

Jessie dashed her hands fiercely, at random, on the keyboard; her forehead was drawn into quite an angry frown.

"I hate that ill-conditioned old woman," she said, with her little white teeth set hard together. "And you bore me, Bertie, with your odious questions."

Mr. Ames leant his elbow on the top of the piano, and considered the girl thoughtfully for a minute or so. He had never seen her in quite this humour before, and it puzzled him.

"Dear me!" he murmured. "I wonder just how much that means."

As soon as Jessie was safely employed again, Mrs. Murray faced round upon Philip. There was a challenge in her bearing. She knew she had ventured pretty far.

"Now, my dear Colonel, we can go on with our talk in peace, I hope," she said.

But the Colonel, by this time, had thoroughly lost his temper. It seemed to him that Mrs. Murray had put herself outside the category of persons to whom one is bound to show respect and consideration. He had no intention of making a scene, but he was prepared to treat her with little mercy.

"Upon my word, Mrs. Murray," he replied, "I am not at all sure that I care to talk."

"No? Ah, well, then I will talk, and you shall listen," she said, still blocking the window with her large person.

Philip laughed. The impudence of this woman was astounding.

"Unfortunately, I am not inclined to listen either," he responded, looking her straight in the face, and slowly pulling the ends of his moustache.

Then that brave old lady, Mrs. Murray, showed the

metal she was made of. She put her hand boldly through Philip Enderby's arm, and held him so.

"Oh! but you must listen, Colonel Enderby," she cried. "I have a dozen words I am bound to say to you. Come with me to the other end of the *loggia*."

To resist, to hang back under this employment of physical force, would have been ridiculous, unseemly, clearly undignified, and out of the question;—so he went.

Mrs. Murray took her amiable way to the back of the *loggia*, from whence a little flying iron staircase leads to the vineyard at the top of the cliff, behind the house. She leant up against the rusty railings of the staircase, which offered but a knife-edge of support to her broad back, and fanned herself with her pocket-handkerchief. Mrs. Murray felt it was a sadly common thing to do; but, poor soul, she was so painfully hot, what with one thing and another.

"My dear Colonel Enderby," she began, in a wheedling tone, "I know you must think my behaviour most extraordinary."

Philip stood stiff, unresponsive, pre-eminently discouraging.

"Yes; most extraordinary. But then, you know, you cannot comprehend the feelings of a mother; no man can do that. We mothers are very lions when the happiness of our children is imperilled. My love for my darling, excellent, faithful Cecilia is my excuse. I cannot," cried Mrs. Murray, with fervour—"no, I cannot, Colonel Enderby, see you neglecting a golden opportunity, and rushing headlong into what I may call the very pit of destruction, knowing what I do know, knowing the contrast between these two women, with-

out opening your eyes, without saying a warning word, without imploring you to——”

At the beginning of this impassioned address, Philip had simply stared; but, as the meaning of Mrs. Murray's words revealed itself, as he began to perceive what she was driving at, he gave a hasty ejaculation of repudiation and anger.

“No, no; I won't be interrupted!” she cried, vehemently. “I can't stand by and see you giving way under the artful fascinations of this heartless woman—using that wretched little girl's prettiness, too, as a stalking-horse to compass her own bad ends—I can't stand by silent, when I know my own dearest child's welfare is at stake. That woman's desire for conquest is insatiable. I know her of old. She can't leave any man alone; she must have every one she meets dangling after her. Look at poor Bertie, estranged from his family, his prospects ruined, spending his money on her, keeping her servants, paying her bills! It makes me blush to see such folly!” she cried, overflowing with virtuous indignation. “And now you are to be ruined too. Why did she leave Florence, do you suppose? Simply, I tell you, because Florence had left her first. She'd filled her house with every sort and kind of riff-raff, socialists, mesmerists—heaven knows what. Poor Eugene Farrell was there nearly every night, at one time; with Cecilia at home, neglected and miserable, sitting up for him till I don't know what hour. Why did she come here to this dull little hole of a place? Because, I tell you, society would not countenance her goings-on any longer; because——”

Mrs. Murray stopped with a gasp: she was breathless. Nothing, indeed, short of physical incapacity would have stemmed the torrent of her eloquence at that moment.

Philip's righteous soul was full of wrath.

"Mrs. Murray," he said sternly, "I call it a vile and shameful thing to come to a woman's house, and then speak of her as you have just spoken of Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay. Fortunately, however, I do not believe what you say."

Mrs. Murray was somewhat cowed.

"Ah! but you are giving in to her," she said vindictively. "You are always here. You can't deny that; so, of course, it doesn't suit you to believe what I tell you about her."

"You are labouring under a complete misconception in this matter," the Colonel answered.

The position was odious to him, but he owed it to his hostess as well as to himself to be explicit.

"I have a great respect for Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay, but we are merely friends. She would be the first person to assure you of that fact."

Mrs. Murray looked up sharply. There was something in her companion's expression which left her in no doubt but that he was speaking the truth. The desire to know more was absolutely uncontrollable in her at that moment. Her eyes glistened with hard curiosity. She decided to stake her all.

"I am not so uncivil as to answer you as you answered me just now," she said, "and tell you roundly I don't believe you. I have my daughter's happiness at heart, Colonel Enderby. For her sake, poor dear

child! I humble myself. A woman will put her pride in her pocket for love of her child. But just listen here. You were going away next day, when we met you that Sunday. Immediately after our meeting, you changed your mind suddenly. We have met frequently since. A certain construction may have been put upon your conduct, you know. For my daughter's sake, I have a right to ask—what made you stay, then? Who did you stay for?"

Mrs. Murray folded her hands, and closed her thin red lips tightly. It was cleverly done, she felt, as she glanced at Philip. She had shifted the point of her attack in a masterly manner. Come what might, he could hardly refuse to answer her.

And Philip was not apt at evasions and subterfuges. Finding himself in an awkward place, he took the shortest and most direct way of getting out of it.

"I stayed," he replied, with quiet dignity, "because I am in love with Miss Pierce-Dawnay. I am about to ask her to be my wife."

For the life of her Mrs. Murray could not restrain a shrill cry. Then she burst out laughing. It was a very unpleasant, old, joyless sort of laugh.

"That little simpering slip of a schoolgirl!" she said. "Why, Philip Enderby, you are as great a simpleton as you were when I saw you first, five-and-twenty years ago!"

In a minute more she was standing before her patient daughter, in the large, faded drawing-room. Her face looked very hard and old.

"Come, Cecilia," she said shortly, "we'll go back to the hotel. There may be letters waiting for us.

Tea? No, thank you. I pay for my dinner at six o'clock, and I don't care to spoil it."

Mrs. Murray laughed again. One must allow, poor lady, that just then she appeared supremely unattractive.

BOOK FOURTH.
THE PROMISED LAND.

CHAPTER I.
QUESTION AND ANSWER.

As Philip Enderby stood there on the *loggia*, after Mrs. Murray had left him, he saw there was only one course open to him. She had forced his hand. He could finesse no longer, but must play his highest card at once. And yet he would have been very glad to wait a little, to make more sure, before he "put it to the proof, to win or lose it all." He hardly dared think what it would be to lose Jessie now! Mrs. Murray's parting words rang in his ears—though he hardly took them, perhaps, in the sense in which she had spoken them. The folly of his love lay, to him, not in the loving—that was natural enough—but rather in the hope of being loved in return.

Just then Jessie came to the window. She carried a large white straw hat in one hand, and her red umbrella in the other. The sun was getting low in the west. Its level rays streamed in under the coloured awning, and lighted up the slight form of the girl, as she stood, framed in the open window, with the background of the dim drawing-room behind her. Philip looked at her for a few seconds in silence. She was very young; she was almost startlingly pretty.

"It is impossible," he thought to himself. "She will refuse me, and then—well, men have had as sweet hopes knocked on the head before now, and will again, I suppose. Only I should have liked more time."

Jessie's face was not as placid as usual. Her mouth pouted a little, and there was a delicate line between her brown eyebrows.

"I think perhaps you did just as well to stay out here, Colonel Enderby," she said. "I played very badly."

She came on into the yellow glare of sunshine.

"Those people worry me, and Bertie says inconvenient things. It is so easy to be pleasant and happy. I can't think why people need ever be anything else."

"Suppose," said the Colonel, gently, "we go away for a little while, and forget troublesome people and the inconvenient speeches. Will you come with me up the hill yonder, and see the sunset?"

He felt the words were not without a grain of feebleness; but it was difficult to be original at this juncture.

"Tell me first, before I settle whether I will go and look at the sunset or not, whether you really preferred staying out here with Mrs. Murray, to coming indoors with the rest of us?" the girl asked.

"I disliked immensely staying out here," Philip replied, with some warmth of feeling. "I stayed simply because I couldn't help myself."

Jessie's face brightened.

"Now we will go for our walk," she said. "I want to get out. I feel strange and restless; perhaps it will be nicer up there."

The little wood crowning the hill behind the Villa

Mortelli, is a delectable place. It is thick with scrub-oak, ilex, and pine trees, rising among a tangled undergrowth of white heath and myrtle;—a quaint, suggestive little wood, fringed along the edge of it with grass and wild flowers, and possessing a number of narrow paths—crossed here and there with knotted roots, or soft with a brown layer of fir needles—which turn and twist, and wind in and out, till they make the small space seem quite vast and imposing.

The effective way of approaching this pleasant wilderness, is to pass along the level strip of vineyard above the house, to the left,—turn at right angles, under some old olive trees, up a narrow gully, where tall canes grow, and clatter their hard stems and long leaves together with a sharp, dry sound in the mountain breeze; pass the old reservoir, where the frogs keep up their discordant chatter; and then—crossing a space of coarse grass, dotted with clumps of heath, through which grey stone crops out here and there, to enter the wood from the rear.

A path leads on, right through it, to the highest point of the hill, where stands a half circle of white marble benches—dilapidated things, upon which mosses have crept, and on which lichens have gathered, patched together with slabs and scraps of ancient carving, remnants probably of a Roman sarcophagus. This open space is shaded by some pines and a couple of oak trees, their trunks bent, and their branches cut over by the rush of the sea wind. It commands the same view as the villa below; but the expanse is wider, the horizon higher, the sense of freedom and solitude more complete.

As presiding genius of this sylvan retreat, some

long-ago owner of the Villa Mortelli has been pleased to set up, on a tall carved pedestal, a marble image of Pan, with his broad chest, shaggy goat's legs, horns, and prick ears. But Pan, alas! has changed sadly since those far-off early days, when as a strange and awful presence—the godhead mysteriously joined to the brute beast—in the solemn twilight of summer mornings, he crossed the dewy Arcadian uplands, among the sleeping sheep-folds; or wandered from the mountain caverns and fragrant mountain marshes to the reed-beds, by the water-courses, in the fertile plain below; and brought good luck to the wild Arcadian hunters, and ravished the heart of Arcadian youth and maiden with the piercing sweetness of his oaten pipe. Yes; Pan has changed: and for the worse. Under the hand of the Italian artist, too often materializing what it touches, Pan has lost his godhead. Pan is chiefly beast now, or, at best, beast bound to a degraded manhood. He has looked on the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life—on the gorgeous corruption of Imperial and Papal Rome. He knows he is a creature of a monstrous birth, and the knowledge has made him foul.

While the sharp blue shadows of the oak leaves and fir needles played over his marble limbs, in the evening sunshine, there was something almost devilish about the image of Pan, keeping watch on the hilltop, above the little red villa. His wide, full lips parted in a wicked smile. There was an evil droop in his heavy eyelids, and a leer in the sightless eyes. The beating winter rains had left ugly stains and smirches upon him; and his pipes, and the hands which held them, were broken and defaced.

Philip Enderby and Jessie came up silently through the wood. The girl was still under the dominion of some unusual influence: she had not regained her ordinary gay, light-hearted bearing. And Philip was too fully possessed by the thought of the thing he must say to her, to have any small talk at command.

Jessie flung herself down on one of the moss grown benches, and pulled off her hat. She was strangely moved and excited.

Oh, I am so tired of this place," she cried, looking away over the broad landscape. "It is always the same—except that sometimes it rains. Nothing ever happens; one day is just like another. And then I think of all the different countries I have never been to and the great cities, and all the beautiful, quick, vivid life that is going on elsewhere, where I cannot reach it, and I could cry with vexation and longing. Why does mamma keep me here like a bird in a cage—with that horrible old Mrs. Murray, too, conning and staring at me through the wires!—and give me nothing to do but to hop up and down, and take my grain of seed and drop of water? I want to go away, away, away;—anywhere, everywhere;—see it, and know it all. You have moved about, you have wandered, don't you understand? I feel like the swallows in the spring-time, when they stretch out their long swift wings, and go northward. Oh, I am tired to death of this place! Why can't I leave it for ever?"

Philip straightened himself up. The crisis had come even sooner than he had expected it. This wild mood of Jessie's gave him a higher hope, a better opportunity, than he could have reckoned upon. Yet still it was difficult to speak. The might of his own emo-

tion was almost terrible to him, as he looked at the lovely upturned face of the girl. Pure-lived men, when they give way to love, do it in a somewhat tremendous fashion. All the garnered strength of their manhood, unspent and unwasted, rushes forth in a flood of worship and desire.

"Jessie," he said at last, very gently; "there is one way in which you may leave all this, that you are so tired of, behind you, and begin a new life."

Something in the tone of Colonel Enderby's voice arrested the girl's attention strongly. She rose up, tall and straight, in front of him, while the sunshine rested on her bright curly head; and looked deep into his blue eyes with a wondering, questioning expression.

"What way?" she asked.

"I am almost ashamed to tell you," he answered; "since you have so much to give, and I have so little to offer in return. I am as a very beggar before you. But there is only this one way in which I can help you. I love you, Jessie—love you with my whole soul. I lay my heart at your feet—take or leave it as you will, it must be yours always, just the same. But take it, darling," he said, "take it, and then come away with me as my wife."

The sun was sinking in a blaze of white light behind the far-off purple capes and headlands. The vineyards below lay already in dim shade; only the window of a high-standing painted villa, here and there, among the rich woods and gardens, caught the level rays on its rows of windows, and glared for a moment like a house of flame. The shadows lay long and dark across the turf, and under the trees; and the

marble Pan leered from his pedestal, and smiled cruelly as he laid his curved lips to the holes in his broken pipe. Then the sun dropped suddenly; and the west grew pale, and the dim shade crept up quickly, stealthily, over the hillside and the trees; over the waiting lover and his mistress—while the limbs of the old pagan god seemed to gleam with a weird, unearthly light of their own, in the dusky wood behind them, now the kindly sun was gone.

“Jessie dearest, answer me,” cried Philip Enderby, passionately. “Can you care for me? Can you trust me? Will you come?”

The girl turned her head for a moment, as the sunlight died, and the chill shadow came up over her. She gave a little shudder. Then she looked up at the Colonel.

“Yes,” she answered softly; “I will come.”

Philip took her two hands in his; and then stepped back, holding her at arm’s length. He let his eyes rest steadily on her lovely face, on every line and curve of her graceful figure. He looked at his love long and carefully, and behold! she was very fair. His face grew pale. The strong man could have given way utterly at that moment, and sobbed aloud. It was too sweet, too wonderful. He felt as though his heart within him must break with love.

“Ah, God help me!” he said.

Yes, it is very awful, this desire of utter self-surrender, this wild worship, this madness of yearning towards the thing we love. It lies deeper than any mere gratification of the senses. Philosophers have called it hard names, and nearly split their brains over it, trying to solve the problem, trying to bridge

the chasm, between the me and the not-me, the subject and the object, the noumenon and the phenomenon,—name it by what crack-jawed word you will. The struggle is old as existence. But the lover, of all men, dares attempt a solution most fateful and desperate when he thus casts his life down blindly at his mistress's feet.

For, alas! the chasm can never be bridged. The limits of our nature are set, and we can never cross them. Though lips press lips never so fondly, and hand clasp hand never so closely, and mind meet mind in the fullest illumination of friendship, there is still a measurable distance between us. Contact is not union, though men in all ages have striven to persuade themselves that it is. And hence comes the pain, the anguish, the exquisite bitterness of true love.

It was with some vague knowledge of all this that Philip Enderby looked at the girl before him.

But that long silent scrutiny and swift exclamation affected her painfully. Her charming face grew troubled, and the corners of her pretty mouth began to turn down and become ominously tremulous.

"Oh, what have we done?" she cried, trying to draw away her hands. "I am frightened."

Philip's expression changed. He grew strong again; he was filled with a delicious right of protection.

"My darling," he answered, "there is nothing to be frightened at. You have done the sweetest and most gracious deed a woman can do. Only I love you too well, Jessie, and I don't know how to tell you about it. I would give my right hand to save you five minutes' sorrow or discomfort—and yet I frighten you. We men are awkward, lumbering, tongue-tied brutes at

best, dear heart; we cannot express the tithe of what we feel."

Jessie looked hard at him for a minute or so, and then the most delightful smile began to dawn on her face.

"Do you really love me so very much?" she asked. "I believe it will all be very pleasant by-and-by, only I feel a little strange just at first. It seems so dreadfully serious. I do not like things to be too serious, you know."

She paused, and then came a little nearer to him. The colour deepened in her soft, cool cheeks; but she glanced up quite fearlessly into his face.

"Wouldn't you like to kiss me?" she said.

And Pan looked on. In the shadowy dusk a kiss was given and taken, as such kisses have been given and taken since the world began—as they will be given and taken, I suppose, till, innumerable ages hence, the drama of earthly existence is played out at last, and every created thing has passed back again into the impenetrable silence and mystery from out of which, at first, it came. But, for good or evil, two lives had bound themselves with one chain. A change had come over the night and the morning, and life could never be quite the same again.

Half an hour later, Jessie came quickly into the drawing-room of the Villa Mortelli. She walked directly up to her step-mother, and sat down by her. She laid her hand gently on Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's, and nestled up to her side.

"Dear little Mamma," she said, "I am afraid I am very late."

There was something startling to Eleanor, both in

the girl's action and in her address. As a rule she avoided all caresses, and made no tender appeals of this kind to her step-mother's sympathy. Eleanor looked at her closely.

"Where have you been, my child?" she asked. "Are you tired?"

Colonel Enderby had followed the girl into the room.

"Jessie and I have been up the hill together, to look at the sunset," he said.

There was a certain resonance in his voice.

Eleanor, as she glanced at him, said to herself, "Why, he has changed; he is quite young. He is certainly a very distinguished-looking man."

Then she had a sudden perception of what had happened.

"Ah!" she cried, clasping her hands together, "you have spoken."

Philip threw back his head and smiled. There was wonderful light in his eyes.

"I am very happy," he said simply; "Jessie must tell you why."

The Colonel lingered late at the little red villa. The conversation was not very brilliant; and yet, perhaps, he found that evening one of the most delightful of his life. Jessie was quiet and subdued; she kept rather close to her step-mother: but the touch of shyness about her made her more bewitching than ever to her lover. She went down on to the terrace with him when he left at last; and there, in the fragrance and solemn stillness of the spring night, they parted. Philip Enderby had got very near the truth, after all, when he called himself happy.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. PIERCE-DAWNAY GROWS SUSPICIOUS OF HER
HANDIWORK.

FOR some reason, Colonel Enderby had developed a strong dislike of Northern Italy, its hot, crowded, modern life, and haunting reminiscences of a not over pure-minded antiquity. A fit of home-sickness came upon him in the midst of his new-found happiness. Like the girl, he wanted to get away. He longed to carry off his charming bride as soon as might be; and her step-mother was not disposed to put any obstacle in the way of the fulfilment of his desires.

There are times when one has a right to be frankly egotistic, to be visibly and unblushingly absorbed in one's own small affairs. Jessie made the most of her privileges in this matter. She was warmly interested in the preparations for her wedding. Her soul was by no means too great to appreciate the fascinations of new dresses and millinery. She did not make any attempt to conceal her pleasure in receiving presents,—not intimating that diamonds are as dross when compared with the words of the lover who offers them. Every healthy-minded girl is a bit of a materialist, and possesses a very hearty respect for those more solid manifestations of affection sanctioned by society. Outward and visible signs are valuable as symbols of inward and spiritual graces in these as in more sacred matters; and, as a rule, are only despised by somewhat exaggerated and fantastical persons.

But Jessie's materialism—if it must needs be called by so ponderous a name—was far too graceful and delicate an affair in any way to disenchant her lover. It was the prettiest thing in the world to receive her thanks, to watch her sparkling pleasure at some fresh gift. Philip was touched and delighted by her endless power of enjoyment. He grew young in the light of her smiles and in the sound of her laughter. Early and late the thought of her possessed him.

Mr. Ames behaved very well during the time which elapsed between that memorable evening in the little wood behind the red villa and Jessie's wedding. He effaced himself. He paid frequent visits to friends in Genoa, and to Mrs. Murray, who, under the plea that the house Cecilia proposed taking at Tullingworth was not yet ready for her, lingered on still at Terzia. He really manifested most praiseworthy powers of endurance. Indeed, from the moment the engagement was publicly announced, he bore himself so bravely that Eleanor began to fancy she had over-estimated the strength of his feelings towards her step-daughter. And this fancy gave her new hope and courage. She threw herself enthusiastically into the situation; invited friends from Florence to be present at the wedding; lavishly expended both money and energy upon the girl's trousseau; and made arrangements with a somewhat regal munificence with the manager of one of the principal hotels in Genoa. For many reasons it seemed desirable that the wedding should not take place there in the country. The party from the Villa Mortelli would meet their guests in Genoa, the day before the wedding. Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay promised herself that it should be quite a brilliant little affair.

Everything, in short, seemed to be going off admirably, when an unexpected stumbling-block and rock of offence turned up in the shape of that devoted waiting-woman, Parker.

"I am sorry, ma'am," she said one evening, as she laid her mistress' dinner dress out on her bed, and pinched the lace ruffles in the sleeves of it into shape, "but I shan't be able to go with you on Tuesday. That new maid of Miss Jessie's can manage very well for you both for one night. I shall stay here till you come back."

Eleanor turned round upon her hastily.

"Really, Parker, at times you are extremely irritating. It isn't at all kind or nice of you to make difficulties just now. Why on earth can't you come?"

Parker stooped down, and arranged some trimming on the front of the dress, which had got a trifle astray, with the utmost composure and precision.

"My feeling is against it, ma'am. There are things you know beforehand you'd better keep clear of, if you want to have your mind easy when you say your prayers of a night."

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay flashed out angrily.

"Parker, you are simply insufferable! It's all very well to talk about an easy mind and so on; you are dreadfully jealous of Jessie's new maid. You want to make us all thoroughly uncomfortable, just because you fancy you are no longer absolutely indispensable."

"Very likely," replied Parker, grimly. "I suppose nobody cares much to see they can be done without. But I ain't going, all the same, ma'am, jealousy or no jealousy."

She knelt down before her mistress, and carefully put on the latter's neat evening shoes. In doing so she observed—

“It seems to me a fearful sort of thing, to give a mere child like her over to a man, to do what he likes with. I don't want to see her married, poor thing! no, nor him either. There's no saying where it'll all lead to for either of them. I don't object to a funeral, now. It's comfortable, in a way. You know it's all over and finished, and you can't be held accountable; but I don't care about the other.”

Parker rose to her feet.

“You've a hair-pin coming out, ma'am—no, there near the top, to the left.—Not but what I think very well of Colonel Enderby, as men go,” she added, rather inconsequently.

Parker, however, followed up her speech with a sniff, which seemed rather to neutralize the worth of this admission, and suggest that, in her opinion, even the best of men could not be expected to go very far.

Mr. Drake, too, sounded a somewhat discordant note more than once, in conversation with his friend. He had travelled back from Venice,—whither, after fruitless waiting for the Colonel at Spezia, he had betaken himself,—to act the part of best man at the coming ceremony. Mr. Drake was naturally gregarious. Under ordinary conditions, the society of some fifteen or twenty agreeable people, with an infinite capacity of talking well about nothing in particular, would have put him into high good-humour. But somehow, the presence of Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay's guests, gathered together in the large Genoese hotel, did not have a

stimulating effect upon him. His native cheerfulness appeared to be in eclipse.

"It all seems so deucedly hurried, you know, Enderby," he said, when he got Philip alone for five minutes. "Of course, you know your own mind, and all that sort of thing, and I have no earthly business to offer an opinion on the subject. I know that. And, of course, she is tremendously pretty; she'll make an immense success in society at home.—Don't be angry, my dear fellow. If you will marry a young lady of a thousand, you must make up your mind to a little of that sort of thing. But all the same, I wish it hadn't been done like this, in a corner, as you may say. If your people had seen her, and so on, it would be different."

Then, as the Colonel began to manifest signs of impatience, not to say of anger, he cried out:—"There, there! I beg your pardon fifty times over, if I have annoyed you. Of course, it's all perfectly right. Only, upon my word——" Mr. Drake turned away and blew his nose energetically. "Confound it all," he said, "I am so awfully attached to you, Enderby, you know."

Eleanor was not in the habit of seeking private interviews with her step-daughter. She was very well aware that their relations were more satisfactory in public than under the expansive and intimate influences of a *tête-à-tête*. But on this last night, before handing her dead husband's child over into Philip Enderby's keeping, she had a strong necessity upon her to see and talk with the girl once more alone. The gentler instincts in Eleanor's strangely blended nature asserted themselves, and made her feel very tenderly towards

Jessie at this particular moment. Then, too, the elder woman was not without a sense of her own shortcomings. Everything was going well, surprisingly well; and yet she knew that she would be more comfortable, and that her conscience would more certainly acquit her of past errors, if cordial and affectionate words passed between her and her step-daughter on the eve of their parting.

She had bidden all her guests good-night, and it was growing late, when Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay walked up the long, bare, glaring passage of the Genoese hotel, and knocked softly at the girl's closed door. There was a pause before any response came from within. Eleanor had a sense of constraint, almost of timidity, as she waited.

The answer came at last, and she went in.

Jessie was standing in the middle of the room. She had taken off her gown; her arms were bare, and her curly hair hung in a luminous cloud about her charming face and shoulders. The room was encumbered with trunks and boxes, and with all that indescribable litter which goes with a great and important packing. Spread out over an armchair, in one corner, lay the rich, soft folds of the girl's white wedding dress, which she had been trying on earlier in the evening. The night was warm, and one of the tall, muslin-curtained windows stood ajar, behind the wooden lattice of the closed shutters, letting in a thick, continuous hum of voices and patter of footsteps from the great *piazza* below. Genoa was still awake, and moving restlessly about her wide squares and streets of palaces.

Eleanor's dramatic instinct was strong. The sight

of this solitary girlish figure, in the high quiet room, with the signs of her marriage and coming departure about her, and the urgent stir and hot full life of the great city surging in through the open window, affected her powerfully. She forgot all the differences which had arisen between them—all those crossings of interest which had put them into an attitude of such disastrous antagonism—and simply yearned, in wholesome womanly love and kindness, towards this fair young creature, setting forth so gaily on the perilous voyage of matrimony.

“Jessie, dearest child,” she said, “I felt I could not go to bed to-night without coming to look at you once more.”

She took the girl’s hand in both hers and made her turn round, so that the light of the gas-jet, above the marble-topped toilette-table, might fall on her face. Then she drew the girl close to her, and kissed her rounded cheek.

“You look very sweet,” she said. “See, dear child,” she went on earnestly, “I want you truly and honestly to answer me one question. You are on the eve of a great undertaking,—of, perhaps, the most important event that can happen in a woman’s life. Tell me, Jessie, are you quite sure you are happy?”

The girl moved a step away, and looked back at her step-mother unshrinkingly. There was no hint of trouble or misgiving in her pretty eyes.

“Ah, that is so like you, little Mamma,” she said, smiling. “You are so fond of assurances. Certainly, I am quite happy. Why should I be anything else? I am immensely interested. I find it all delightful.”

The words might have carried conviction, surely,

to her listener; but Eleanor wanted more. She felt, as she had often felt before now, that there was something baffling, something curiously difficult to grasp, in this brilliant being's personality. At times, she had asked herself whether her step-daughter was the most absolutely natural, or the most consummately artificial woman she had ever met with.

"But tell me, Jessie," she insisted, "don't mind telling me—remember, I have been a girl too, and can enter into your thoughts and feelings; surely we may speak freely to each other just now, if we may ever speak freely at all—are you sure you are really in love with Colonel Enderby?"

The girl's face grew graver.

"I never quite understand what people mean when they say all those things about being in love," she answered. "They seem to imply that it is a mysterious and extraordinary condition. I never have understood, and I do not want to do so. It sounds rather uncomfortable and crazy. But I like him very much; I like being with him. He is very pleasant; he is beautifully kind to me."

She smiled, and drew away her hand, which Eleanor was still holding, with an apologetic little shiver.

"Pardon me, but your hands are so very cold, little Mamma," she said; and then added, after a moment's reflection, "I don't quite see why you should ask me these questions to-night. I took for granted you were satisfied, and had meant it all to happen so from the first."

Jessie spoke with perfect openness and good-temper, as though making the most obvious of state-

ments. But to Eleanor the words came as a violent shock. It is not a little disconcerting to hear something which you have known, yet tried not to know,—not acknowledged even in secret to yourself,—proclaimed clearly, concisely, and without the smallest hint of confusion by another person.

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay stood for a moment uncertain what to do, how to answer. She had an unreasoning revulsion of sentiment against this marriage of her own making—a revulsion against poor Jessie, too. She was addicted to prompt and daring action; to slightly desperate efforts at making the crooked straight, and rough places plain; but in this case, desire it how she might, prompt and daring action was out of the question. The whole matter had got beyond her control. There lay Jessie's wedding dress; there were her trunks, ready strapped and labelled; there, on the toilette-table, gleamed the string of pearls her lover had given her to wear to-morrow. In the face of these plain, tangible tokens of the position, Eleanor saw she was powerless. Too, her feeling of alarm was, after all, but transitory. She recalled Colonel Enderby's looks when he had bidden her good-night an hour before. They were certainly those of a man who is sufficiently confident of the good promise of his prospects.

"I am attaching an exaggerated importance to Jessie's words," she thought. "Putting a false construction on them, perhaps. I always read between the lines too cleverly, and worry myself when there is no real cause for it."

The girl, meanwhile, had turned back to the look-

ing-glass, and was engaged in coiling up her bright hair.

"I am getting so tired, little Mamma," she said, in a plaintive voice.

The remark brought Eleanor to a quick decision. She determined, in any case, to speak a good word for Philip Enderby before she took leave of her step-daughter.

"I won't keep you any longer, dear child," she said. "Sleep well, and look your prettiest to-morrow. Only remember, Jessie, Colonel Enderby loves you passionately—more deeply than you can measure. Don't disappoint him; don't undervalue his love. Such affection is a great possession to any woman; but it is sensitive, it is easily wounded. Be careful, dear. You will try to please him always, and be a devoted wife to him, won't you?"

The girl passed her hand across her smooth forehead rather wearily.

"Oh yes, of course I shall, Mamma. It would be horribly stupid to do anything else."

And with this somewhat enigmatic reply, Eleanor had to content herself.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH MALVOLIO DOES THE HONOURS OF THE
VILLA MORTELLI.

FORTUNATELY, the misanthropic views on the subject of marriage expressed by Parker do not obtain at all universally. Quite a large gathering waited in the handsome black and white English church in the Via Goito next forenoon. Most weddings are interesting, and this particular wedding was uncommonly so. It had a halo of romance hanging about it, a savour of the unexpected and improbable. The bride was so young and so ravishingly pretty. The bridegroom, on the other hand, was not at all young; but he was somebody, he had made a name for himself, he dressed well, he looked an eminent gentleman.

People smiled and gossiped good-humouredly.—“Yes, it was romantic. Did she have her gown made here or in Paris? Paris, probably. It fitted miraculously, but it was a little pinched in the trimmings. The pearls were good; and how well they looked against her fair skin—just that warm suggestion of tone in it which is so lovely. Ah!—like that,—everybody hoped all would go well with them, and wondered—for the step-mother was incontestably a very striking person—wondered whether there might not be just a little something behind, an explanation, you know, a *dessous-des-cartes*?”

Colonel Enderby was impatient to hurry his bride away, when she came down after the breakfast, dressed for her journey. He turned restive under all this ceremonial and publicity. The staring, the talking, the small compliments that had to be amiably responded to, the general sense of being the hero of a highly amusing and popular comedy, was anything but agreeable to him. The Colonel was both modest and proud. He bore himself extremely well; but he did not in the least wish to extend the period of his ordeal.

"We won't miss our train," he said at last to Jessie, as she stood in the centre of a little circle of friends, in the frescoed *salon* of the hotel.

Certainly the young lady repaid inspection wonderfully well at that moment. The touch of demureness in her delicate grey travelling gown and grey bonnet, and a little assumption of dignity in her manner, only brought her almost infantine prettiness into more telling relief. To Philip Enderby she was wholly adorable, standing there fastening her long gloves, and smiling at the assembled company. As a necessary consequence of that adoration he had the very liveliest longing to get her away from all these people. It seemed to him little short of profanation that any one but himself should venture to gaze at her.

"Yes, it is getting late. You had certainly better start," drawled Bertie Ames.

He moved away, and took up his position by the door of the *salon* as he spoke.

"It would be rather unlucky to begin so immediately by losing something, you know—even if it

was only the train to Milan. The losing can very well keep till later."

Jessie went through the inevitable hand-shaking and embracing with calmness and resignation. She paused a moment opposite to her step-mother.

"Good-bye, dear little Mamma, till we meet in England, delightful England," she said brightly.

Then the two women kissed each other.

Tears were in Eleanor's eyes as she pressed Colonel Enderby's hand in hers.

"Ah, my good friend," she said, "I pray God you may be very happy."

Her expression was appealing, and there was a fine intensity in it.

"I am very happy," he replied quietly, as he bowed over her clasped hands; "and I am grateful to you."

"Thank you for that."

"You need not fear but that I shall guard the treasure you have given me very jealously.—You know, you have only to command me at any time, if I can serve you."

Eleanor made a rapid gesture of assent. She felt an immense honour and regard for this man.

Bertie stood by the door, waiting for Jessie to pass out into the great hall beyond. He looked very languid, very gentleman-like, and wore the inevitable gardenia, along with the orange blossom, in the button-hole of his frock coat. As the young lady approached him, a singular thinness and pallor came over his dark face.

"I shall miss my charming little cousin a good deal," he said, taking her hand in his for a moment.

"Farewell, Jessie Enderby."

The girl started visibly at the sound of her new name. She gave herself a curious little shake.

"I am glad you will miss me," she answered. Then, glancing up at him quickly, "But you will soon console yourself, Bertie. It will pass; as for that, one does not miss any one very long."

Bertie Ames put up his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders.

"You are admirably philosophic under all circumstances, Jessie. Yes, decidedly I will do my best to find consolations."

Colonel Enderby, escaping from the affectionate overflowings of Mr. Drake, arrived just in time to hear Bertie's last words. The two men exchanged a not altogether friendly glance, and merely bowed to each other.

Outside in the hall, Jessie turned suddenly to her husband. She passed her hand through his arm, and clung to him with a strange vehemence.

"Philip, will you promise always to be as kind to me as you are now?" she cried.

"My darling," he exclaimed, "what a question!"

He was half pleased, half pained by the girl's earnestness.

"God forbid that you should ever find me one whit less kind. I am not much given to changing, Jessie. I must always love you better, hold you dearer, than life itself."

Philip Enderby's expression was very tender and pathetic as he looked at her.

A little crowd of friends, backed by all the *employés* of the hotel—who could not forbear making the most of this opportunity of sight-seeing and gossip

—thronged into the hall after them. Jessie recovered herself quickly. She had an innate regard for appearances. She passed out to the carriage, brilliant, smiling, and apparently light-hearted as usual.

"*Mon Dieu*," whispered a French chambermaid to the *garçon* near her; "but how young she is, and how pretty! Wait a little, there will be three to the *ménage* one of these days."

Her companion smiled blandly, spread out his hands with an air of wide and varied experience, and replied—

"Ah, one cannot foretell. They are English. The habits of the English are extremely droll."

The hall of the hotel was destined to witness another episode, of a somewhat penetrating character, before the close of Colonel Enderby's wedding day.

Eleanor had arranged to set out on her drive back to the Villa Mortelli about half-past five o'clock. By that time her guests would have gone their several ways; and the traffic on the Corniche road would be less heavy in the evening. A little before the half-hour she came downstairs. The glory of the day was over, and Eleanor had exchanged her wedding finery for one of her ordinary black dresses, with its many crisp pleatings and flouncings. Over it she wore a long, light-coloured coat, to preserve her clothes from the dusty horrors of the high-road.

The excitement, not only of this day, but of the several months, had come to an abrupt termination, and with Eleanor the reaction was already setting in. Her plans had prospered; everything had worked perfectly; she could assure herself, almost without a misgiving, that she had done the best for everybody—for

Jessie, for Colonel Enderby, and for Bertie Ames too, in the long run, though at present he might be a trifle slow to acknowledge it: people are so ridiculously blind at times to their own highest good! For herself, she had brought a relation of a difficult and perplexing nature to a happy close; she had extricated herself from a situation which had threatened to become actually tragic. On the face of it, she had every reason for self-congratulation just now. She should have folded her hands restfully, thanked a benignant Providence for past favours, and looked towards the future with confidence and serenity. But in point of fact she did none of these comfortable things, as she came slowly downstairs into the great cool hall,—with its plants and palms in green wooden boxes, and its small army of smiling porters and waiters, lounging about, and staring good-humouredly at the stream of people crossing and recrossing each other on the pavement outside, and at the crowded movement of the broad, sun-blinded square beyond.

Eleanor was tried and worried. She was singularly incapable in the small affairs of daily life. She had been obliged to pack her own trunk and valise—Jessie's maid having departed along with her mistress—and this simple business had caused her considerable embarrassment. She felt cross with Parker; injured at her desertion. And then, too, she had never contemplated this dull, uninteresting space of time, when the old excitement would be over, and no new one would have appeared to take its place.

To do Eleanor justice, I must insist upon the fact that she had looked no further, planned for nothing, beyond Jessie's marriage. That had presented itself

to her as the end to be attained, as the supreme solution of all alarms and difficulties. What might happen later, she had but very vaguely imagined. All must then go well, she supposed; but she had shrunk with a creditable instinct from exploring the probabilities of the future, even in thought. It was the nature of the woman to fling herself, with almost hysterical vehemence, in pursuit of a definite object; disregarding consequences, disregarding side issues, with a childish inconsequence. Now, her object being attained, she found herself suddenly face to face with that enigmatical future; and at a moment, too, when she felt particularly ordinary, commonplace, and acutely disturbed by the vulgar details of existence.

A sense of uneasiness and disquiet laid hold on Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay as she waited for her carriage. She looked out at the bright, dusty, picturesque *piazza* for a minute or so, and then turned and glanced towards the door of the smoking-room, in the corridor on the right, from whence she expected Bertie every moment to come and join her. She hated delay. She bit her lip and patted her neatly shod foot on the marble floor with growing impatience.

The hotel manager, a rotund, middle-aged Italian, blessed with a sleek white face, closely cropped black hair, and an air of indescribable benevolence, came forward, rubbing his fat hands, and bowing profusely.

"He regretted immensely that madame should be kept waiting, but it still wanted some minutes to the hour she had named in her esteemed command for the carriage. He could never sufficiently express his gratitude to madame for her goodness in having selected his hotel as a suitable locality where might be

accomplished the interesting event of the morning. Ah! and by the way, Mr. Ames,—the gentleman who had left by the half-past four-o'clock train,—had entrusted him with a letter for madame, which he now did himself the honour to present to her. On receiving it he had proposed to permit no delay, to deliver it to her immediately; but the gentleman had instructed him to wait till madame was leaving."

Eleanor grew nearly as white as the marble quarries under her feet, as she took the note that the beaming Italian held out to her. A great horror came over her, a sudden frightful self-revelation. But she mastered herself. She thanked the florid-mannered manager for his courtesy. The arrangements had been admirable in every particular; they left nothing to be desired.

The man laid one thick white hand upon his wilderness of shirt-bosom, and bowed with speechless fervour.

"Ah! but there was the carriage at last, as madame, no doubt, perceived. In three seconds her baggage would be placed—so. Now might he have the honour of assisting her to enter it?"

She walked out to the carriage firmly, and even contrived to make one or two suitable little speeches to the engaging Italian by the way—which, under the circumstances, was little short of heroic. But her heart was like a stone. She had no need to read Bertie Ames' letter—she knew quite well what was in it already.

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay drove through the magnificent Genoese streets, with their solemn splendour of building, and their teeming, restless, charming, grotesque human figures; through the long, arid, straggling suburbs,

beyond the fortifications; and out on to the dusty high-road, sitting stiff and upright in the carriage, while the yellow evening sunshine poured down upon and scorched her. The great blue rollers rushed joyously up against the sea-wall on the left, behind the tall narrow warehouses and flat market-gardens, and broke in clouds of snowy foam with a deep-mouthed roar, which might be heard above all the braying of mules, and shouting and swearing of savage-looking drivers, and rattle of wheels, and grate of tramcars on the high-road. Dusty roses hung over the high walls on the right, and richly coloured villas glowed amid the cool glossy green of their old walled gardens. Now and again there was a block of waggons or mule trains, and the carriage drew up for a while in the midst of a struggling, seething mass of straining animals and yelling, lashing human beings.

Ordinarily, Eleanor would have been exceedingly well aware both of the beautiful and of the repulsive elements in her surroundings; but, as it was, she saw and heeded nothing. She had glanced at the first few lines of Bertie's farewell letter, and a shame, a self-contempt, so scathing had overtaken her that the drama of sea and sky and sunset, of the contrast between the dignity and the brutality of the scene before her, was thin and insignificant compared with the depth of her own emotion.

"Good-byes are unpleasant things," wrote Bertie Ames. "We have had plenty of them already to-day; so, dear Cousin, I venture to spare myself the pain of saying that odious word to you. Of course, I don't for an instant permit myself the impertinence of supposing you contemplated my remaining your guest after

to-day. Jessie's presence satisfied *les convenances*. You are too kind to give me my *congé*, but I understand——”

Eleanor read no further. Mistaken, exaggerated, imprudent, even at moments cruel, as she was, the springs of womanly modesty still rose pure and unpolluted within her. She recoiled with passionate disgust and horror. Good heavens! that a man should ever have cause to say such things to her! that she should have been so utterly blind and stupid, in her mad desire to clear the way, to get rid of the obstacle that seemed to interpose between herself and the thing she longed after—as to have ignored the obvious result, and so checkmated herself. She had been too hot-headed, she had played too high, and lost everything, including her own self-respect. And then, in an agony of terror, she began to ask herself whether she might not have compassed the ruin of other lives besides her own?

The only safe thing, after all, is to leave events in the hands of Fate or Providence—say which you will. Directly petty human purpose comes in, trying to modify, or wrest to its own uses, the actions of others, so soon does Nemesis rise up, and follow on after us,—on, on, with ever-nearing footsteps, till the sound of her terrible tread is in our ears, and we feel the awful gloom of her approaching presence. But she may pass us by?—Oh yes; pass us, the sinners, leave us in peace and comfort; pass us to crush, to maim, to mutilate those whom we used so thoughtlessly as tools and puppets. It is easy enough to set the machine of destiny in motion, but once the great wheels are whirring, turning, spinning, no mortal hand is strong enough to stay them again.

The dusk had fallen when the carriage drew up at the front door of the Villa Mortelli. The house looked grim and deserted. A dull light was burning in the bare, cold hall. The driver pulled the bell and drummed on the panels of the half-open door; but the noise he made evoked nothing more substantial than a dreary echo.

Utterly weary and self-abased, Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay got out of the carriage, and went indoors. In the dimness of the hall, she could perceive but one living creature, one being there ready to welcome her home.

On the low marble pillar, ending the balusters at the bottom of the staircase, sat Malvolio, hunched up together, his wizened face more wrinkled, anxious, mournful than ever. As Eleanor came in at the door, he craned out his skinny neck, peeping and peering into the darkness behind her, with quick uneasy liftings of the eyelids and eyebrows. He had on the little red tattered jacket in which Bertie sometimes clothed him in cold or rainy weather; while, on the narrow bosom of it, Antonio, with a truly Italian taste for staring incongruities, had pinned a large bunch of orange blossom, tied with a flaring bow of white satin ribbon. When the monkey's quick instinct assured him that his master had not come home too, he turned fiercely on Eleanor, pointing, grinning, chattering at her with impotent malignity. There was a diabolical light in the creature's sad eyes, and something absolutely hideous in its furious gestures.

Eleanor, overstrung and exhausted, could not bear it. She called aloud in terror and agitation; and her voice rang up the cold, white staircase, and through the empty, silent rooms of the little red villa.

"They are all, all gone," she cried, "and I am here alone in this horrible place. He has taken away everything that I love, and you"—she pointed wildly at the monkey—"you are all he has left me!"

Parker, a straight, harsh, grey figure, came down hurriedly from the upper story.

"God help us!" she cried. "What's the matter? What has happened?"

Mrs. Pierce-Dawnay flung her arms round the faithful woman's neck, and burst into a passion of sobbing.

"Ah, my dear, my poor dear lady!" she murmured. "Are there none of them left but me to take care of you? Come away, ma'am, come away! You're worn to death with all this silly turmoil and worry. Come upstairs with me quietly to your room. There, just what I always say; you can't put dependence on any man! That feather-headed old sawney, Antonio, promised me he'd be sure to be here to meet you, and take down the boxes."

END OF VOL. I.

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